Romana is the bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. These pages reprint documents of the Holy See directed to the entire Church, as well as those referring specifically to Opus Dei. It also provides news about the activities of the Prelate and the Prelature in the service of the Church and the local dioceses. Brief articles are included about some of the apostolic initiatives fostered by faithful of the Prelature within their profession and in society at large in their endeavor to infuse a Christian spirit into the secular sphere.

The contents of the bulletin do not provide an entire picture of Opus Dei’s activities, since the Prelature’s fundamental apostolate is that which its faithful carry out personally, guided by the Christian formation and spiritual assistance they receive from the Prelature. This apostolate takes place in the context of each person’s professional, social, and family setting, and its variety and creativity naturally cannot be reduced to a set of statistics.

Romana’s publication fulfills an express desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá. In choosing the title Romana for the future bulletin, St. Josemaría wished to emphasize the catholic and universal character of Opus Dei’s pastoral mission.
EDITORIAL

- A Spirit of Adoration

HOLY SEE

The Roman Pontiff

- Apostolic Letter Mane Nobiscum Domine for the Year of the Eucharist (October 7, 2004)
- Homily on the 150th anniversary of the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (August 15, 2004)

The Roman Curia

- Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and the world (July 31, 2004)

PRELATE

Activities of the Prelate

- Pastoral trips: Spain (Pamplona), France, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Slovenia, Croatia, Spain, (Barcelona)

Pastoral Letters

- A pastoral letter to the faithful of the Prelature and its cooperators on the occasion of the Year of the Eucharist (Oct. 6, 2004)

Homilies

- At the Marian Family Conference, Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (Sept. 4, 2004)
- At the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature, Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (Sept. 5, 2004)
- At the blessing of a sculpture of St. Josemaría in the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom, Barcelona (Sept. 17, 2004)
- At the novena of the Immaculate Conception, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (Dec. 5, 2004)
- At the Mass opening the academic year of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Basilica of St. Apollinaris, Rome (Oct. 11, 2004)
• On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Parish of St. Josemaria, Rome (December 8, 2004)

• At the opening of the Eucharistic Year in the Prelature, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (Oct. 30, 2004 and Nov. 1, 2004)

Addresses

• At the opening of the academic year of the Pontifical Unniversity of the Holy Cross, Rome (Oct. 11, 2004)

• At the ceremony for laying the first stone of the Campus Biomedico in Trigoria, Rome (Nov. 30, 2004)

ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA

• Other News

• Publication of the book Vida y venturas de un borrico de noria...y su Relojerico (Life of a Donkey at the Waterwheel...)

• Centennial of the pilgrimage of the Escriva family to Torreciudad

• The Inauguration of a street dedicated to St. Josemaría in Lucca, (Italy)

NEWS

• Pontifical Appointments

• Beginning of apostolic work in Latvia

• Establishment of new Centers of the Prelature

• Other News

INITIATIVES

• The fiftieth anniversary of the School of Medicine at the University of Navarre and the inauguration of the Medical Research Center (CIMA)

In Brief

• Turin, (Italy) -- A course in Italian culture for domestic workers

• Paris, (France) -- Europe a lively debate

• Auckland (New Zealand) -- Training of catechists

• Quezon City, (Philippines) -- The Internet and public opinion

• Kampala, (Uganda) -- International rural project

• Valencia, (Spain) -- Fashions, Communication and Society
• Bogota, (Colombia) Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of La Sabana University
• Johannesburg, (South Africa) -- A course in hospitality and tourism
• Kreuzweingarten, (Germany) -- Dare to develop your own personality
• Libson, (Portugal) -- Europe, know yourself
• Taipei, (Taiwan) -- Volunteers with the aged
• Buenos Aires, (Argentina) -- A Conference on the family
• Sao Paulo, (Brazil) -- Ethics and citizenship
• Santiago, (Chile) -- UNIV 2005: Projecting culture --- the language of music
• Rio de Janeiro, (Brazil) -- In a fishing village
• Nairobi, (Kenya) -- Judicial ethics and ontology
• La Paz, (Bolivia) -- Tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family
• Jonacatepec, (Mexico) -- Summer course in English
• Queretaro, (Mexico) -- In the Sierra Gorda
• Sydney, (Australia) -- Work camp in a fishing village
• Asuncion, (Paraguay) -- Conference on the family
• Montevideo, (Uruguay) -- University Conference on Fashion

IN PACE

• Faithful of Opus Dei and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who died in the second half of 2004

A STUDY

• Woman in the Divine Economy: From the Church Fathers to St. Josemaría
A Spirit of Adoration

A Eucharistic Year for the whole Church began in October in accordance with the wishes of the Holy Father. What was the Pope's purpose in making this pastoral decision? What is he asking of us?

Less than two years ago, John Paul II directed to all Catholics his most recent encyclical, precisely on the topic of the Eucharist. In his apostolic letter for the Eucharistic Year, Mane Nobiscum Domine, John Paul II tells us that this is a new invitation to the Church to reflect upon the Eucharist.[1] But the mystery of the Eucharist, a sign and a reality, a sacrifice and a food, a simple substance containing Christ's memorial and presence, cannot be easily captured in the mesh of cold reflection. The invitation to reflect on the Eucharist is, inescapably, a call to give oneself to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to participate in the heavenly liturgy, to adore. “The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth,” the Pope wrote in his encyclical on the Eucharist. “It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.”[2]

It is, after all, a mystery of faith and love, before which we must “fall down in adoration. Only thus can we adequately show that we believe that the Eucharist is truly Christ, really and substantially present: his Body, his Blood, his Soul and his Divinity.”[3]

We know that “adoration is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator.”[4] We know this very well, but experience—our own experience and the experience of Christian life gathered and transmitted down through the centuries—teaches us that we should always be striving to go deeper here, like the building under construction which, the higher it rises the deeper must be it foundations, or the wise man who, the more he knows the more convinced he is of how little he knows. “To adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the ‘nothingness of the creature’ who would not exist but for God. To adore God is to praise and exalt him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that he has done great things and holy is his name (cf. Lk 1:46-49). The worship of the one
God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world.”[5]

To adore God is also, therefore, to ask him for good things and to thank him, since both our petition and our thanksgiving are a recognition of our absolute dependence before him. At the same time, we adore God by our work when we try to make of it a holy and sanctifying reality, cooperating in the work of creation,[6] when we offer it in union with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, renewed daily in the sublime moment that is the Holy Mass, the center and root of our interior life and of our whole life.

We adore God, finally, when our intellect, submitted to and elevated by faith,[7] recognizes in the sacramental species Christ’s real presence, made for us into the bread of life and drink of salvation. “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’ (Apostolic letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, 32), 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!”[8]

Each person, and the world as a whole, needs this intense and trusting contact with Christ in the Eucharist. The men and women of today, more than ever, need a firm support for their lives. And a God who has made himself into bread reveals himself, even in this apparent weakness, as the rock on which they can rest. What a pity if, owing to poor witness we give of love for God, of adoration, of “the good manners of piety,”[9] those around us would fail to discover that marvel of God truly present among us! How often a liturgical ceremony carried out with reverence and dignity, or a simple gesture of devout adoration, has proved more effective than any preaching in arousing faith in those who don’t believe!

“The intensity of our Eucharistic piety determines the value of our life.”[10] Much depends, indeed, on whether, as the Pope desires, “in this Year of grace, sustained by Mary, the Church discover[s] new enthusiasm
for her mission and come[s] to acknowledge ever more fully that the Eucharist is the source and summit of her entire life.”

[5] Ibid., 2097.

Torna ai contenuti
HOLY SEE

- The Roman Pontiff
- The Roman Curia
Introduction

1. “Stay with us, Lord, for it is almost evening” (cf. Lk 24:29). This was the insistent invitation that the two disciples journeying to Emmaus on the evening of the day of the resurrection addressed to the Wayfarer who had accompanied them on their journey. Weighed down with sadness, they never imagined that this stranger was none other than their Master, risen from the dead. Yet they felt their hearts burning within them (cf. v. 32) as he spoke to them and “explained” the Scriptures. The light of the Word unlocked the hardness of their hearts and “opened their eyes” (cf. v. 31). Amid the shadows of the passing day and the darkness that clouded their spirit, the Wayfarer brought a ray of light which rekindled their hope and led their hearts to yearn for the fullness of light. “Stay with us”, they pleaded. And he agreed. Soon afterwards, Jesus’ face would disappear, yet the Master would “stay” with them, hidden in the “breaking of the bread” which had opened their eyes to recognize him.

2. The image of the disciples on the way to Emmaus can serve as a fitting guide for a Year when the Church will be particularly engaged in living out the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Amid our questions and difficulties, and even our bitter disappointments, the divine Wayfarer continues to walk at our side, opening to us the Scriptures and leading us to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of God. When we meet him fully, we will pass from the light of the Word to the light streaming from the “Bread of life”, the supreme fulfillment of his promise to “be with us always, to the end of the age” (cf. Mt 28:20).

3. The “breaking of bread”—as the Eucharist was called in earliest times—has always been at the centre of the Church’s life. Through it Christ makes present within time the mystery of his death and resurrection. In it he is
received in person as the “living bread come down from heaven” (Jn 6:51), and with him we receive the pledge of eternal life and a foretaste of the eternal banquet of the heavenly Jerusalem. Following the teaching of the Fathers, the Ecumenical Councils and my own Predecessors, I have frequently urged the Church to reflect upon the Eucharist, most recently in the Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia. Here I do not intend to repeat this teaching, which I trust will be more deeply studied and understood. At the same time I thought it helpful for this purpose to dedicate an entire Year to this wonderful sacrament.

4. As is known, the Year of the Eucharist will be celebrated from October 2004 to October 2005. The idea for this celebration came from two events which will serve to mark its beginning and end: the International Eucharistic Congress, which will take place from 10-17 October 2004 in Guadalajara, Mexico, and the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will be held in the Vatican from 2-29 October 2005 on the theme: “The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church”. I was also guided by another consideration: this year’s World Youth Day will take place in Cologne from 16-21 August 2005. I would like the young people to gather around the Eucharist as the vital source which nourishes their faith and enthusiasm. A Eucharistic initiative of this kind had been on my mind for some time: it is a natural development of the pastoral impulse which I wanted to give to the Church, particularly during the years of preparation for the Jubilee and in the years that followed it.

5. In the present Apostolic Letter, I wish to reaffirm this pastoral continuity and to help everyone to grasp its spiritual significance. As for the particular form which the Year of the Eucharist will take, I am counting on the personal involvement of the Pastors of the particular Churches, whose devotion to this great Mystery will not fail to suggest suitable approaches. My Brother Bishops will certainly understand that this initiative, coming as it does so soon after the celebration of the Year of the Rosary, is meant to take place on a deeply spiritual level, so that it will in no way interfere with the pastoral programs of the individual Churches. Rather, it can shed light upon those programs, anchoring them, so to speak, in the very Mystery which nourishes the spiritual life of the faithful and the initiatives of each
local Church. I am not asking the individual Churches to alter their pastoral programs, but to emphasize the Eucharistic dimension which is part of the whole Christian life. For my part, I would like in this Letter to offer some basic guidelines; and I am confident that the People of God, at every level, will welcome my proposal with enthusiasm and fervent love.

I. In the wake of the council and the great jubilee

Looking towards Christ

6. Ten years ago, in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (November 10, 1994), I had the joy of proposing to the Church a program of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. It seemed to me that this historic moment presented itself as a great grace. I realized, of course, that a simple chronological event, however evocative, could not by itself bring about great changes. Unfortunately the Millennium began with events which were in tragic continuity with the past, and often with its worst aspects. A scenario emerged which, despite certain positive elements, is marred by acts of violence and bloodshed which cause continued concern. Even so, in inviting the Church to celebrate the Jubilee of the two-thousandth anniversary of the Incarnation, I was convinced—and I still am, more than ever!—that this celebration would be of benefit to humanity in the “long term”.

Jesus Christ stands at the centre not just of the history of the Church, but also the history of humanity. In him, all things are drawn together (cf. Eph 1:10; Col 1:15-20). How could we forget the enthusiasm with which the Second Vatican Council, quoting Pope Paul VI, proclaimed that Christ is “the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the centre of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations”?\[1\] The Council’s teaching gave added depth to our understanding of the nature of the Church, and gave believers a clearer insight not only into the mysteries of faith but also into earthly realities, seen in the light of Christ. In the Incarnate Word, both the mystery of God and the mystery of man are revealed.\[2\] In him, humanity finds redemption and fulfillment.

7. In the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, at the beginning of my Pontificate, I developed this idea, and I have frequently returned to it on
other occasions. The Jubilee was a fitting time to invite believers once again to consider this fundamental truth. The preparation for the great event was fully Trinitarian and Christocentric. Within this plan, there clearly had to be a place for the Eucharist. At the start of this Year of the Eucharist, I repeat the words which I wrote in Tertio Millennio Adveniente: “The Year 2000 will be intensely Eucharistic; in the Sacrament of the Eucharist the Saviour, who took flesh in Mary’s womb twenty centuries ago, continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life.”[3] The International Eucharistic Congress, held that year in Rome, also helped to focus attention on this aspect of the Great Jubilee. It is also worth recalling that my Apostolic Letter Dies Domini, written in preparation for the Jubilee, invited believers to meditate on Sunday as the day of the Risen Lord and the special day of the Church. At that time I urged everyone to rediscover the celebration of the Eucharist as the heart of Sunday.[4]

Contemplating with Mary the face of Christ

8. The fruits of the Great Jubilee were collected in the Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte. In this programmatic document, I suggested an ever greater pastoral engagement based on the contemplation of the face of Christ, as part of an ecclesial pedagogy aimed at “the high standard” of holiness and carried out especially through the art of prayer.[5] How could such a program be complete without a commitment to the liturgy and in particular to the cultivation of Eucharistic life? As I said at the time: “In the twentieth century, especially since the Council, there has been a great development in the way the Christian community celebrates the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is necessary to continue in this direction, and to stress particularly the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself, experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter.”[6] In this context of a training in prayer, I recommended the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, by which the Church sanctifies the different hours of the day and the passage of time through the liturgical year.

9. Subsequently, with the proclamation of the Year of the Rosary and the publication of the Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae, I returned to the theme of contemplating the face of Christ, now from a Marian perspective, by encouraging once more the recitation of the Rosary.
This traditional prayer, so highly recommended by the Magisterium and so dear to the People of God, has a markedly biblical and evangelical character, focused on the name and the face of Jesus as contemplated in the mysteries and by the repetition of the “Hail Mary.” In its flow of repetitions, it represents a kind of pedagogy of love, aimed at evoking within our hearts the same love that Mary bore for her Son. For this reason, developing a centuries-old tradition by the addition of the mysteries of light, I sought to make this privileged form of contemplation an even more complete “compendium of the Gospel.” And how could the mysteries of light not culminate in the Holy Eucharist?

*From the Year of the Rosary to the Year of the Eucharist*

10. In the midst of the Year of the Rosary, I issued the Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia, with the intention of shedding light on the mystery of the Eucharist in its inseparable and vital relation to the Church. I urged all the faithful to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice with due reverence, offering to Jesus present in the Eucharist, both within and outside Mass, the worship demanded by so great a Mystery. Above all, I suggested once again the need for a Eucharistic spirituality and pointed to Mary, “woman of the Eucharist,” as its model.

The Year of the Eucharist takes place against a background which has been enriched by the passage of the years, while remaining ever rooted in the theme of Christ and the contemplation of his face. In a certain sense, it is meant to be a year of synthesis, the high-point of a journey in progress. Much could be said about how to celebrate this year. I would simply offer some reflections intended to help us all to experience it in a deeper and more fruitful way.

**II. The Eucharist,**

*a mystery of light*

“He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” *(Lk 24:27)*

11. The account of the Risen Jesus appearing to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus helps us to focus on a primary aspect of the Eucharistic mystery, one which should always be present in the devotion of
the People of God: The Eucharist is a mystery of light! What does this mean, and what are its implications for Christian life and spirituality?

Jesus described himself as the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12), and this quality clearly appears at those moments in his life, like the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, in which his divine glory shines forth brightly. Yet in the Eucharist the glory of Christ remains veiled. The Eucharist is pre-eminently a mysterium fidei. Through the mystery of his complete hiddenness, Christ becomes a mystery of light, thanks to which believers are led into the depths of the divine life. By a happy intuition, Rublëv’s celebrated icon of the Trinity clearly places the Eucharist at the center of the life of the Trinity.

12. The Eucharist is light above all because at every Mass the liturgy of the Word of God precedes the liturgy of the Eucharist in the unity of the two “tables”, the table of the Word and the table of the Bread. This continuity is expressed in the Eucharistic discourse of Saint John’s Gospel, where Jesus begins his teaching by speaking of the mystery of his person and then goes on to draw out its Eucharistic dimension: “My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:55). We know that this was troubling for most of his listeners, which led Peter to express the faith of the other Apostles and of the Church throughout history: “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). In the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Christ himself intervenes to show, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets”, how “all the Scriptures” point to the mystery of his person (cf. Lk 24:27). His words make the hearts of the disciples “burn” within them, drawing them out of the darkness of sorrow and despair, and awakening in them a desire to remain with him: “Stay with us, Lord” (cf. v. 29).

13. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in the Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium, sought to make “the table of the word” offer the treasures of Scripture more fully to the faithful. Consequently they allowed the biblical readings of the liturgy to be proclaimed in a language understood by all. It is Christ himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church. The Council Fathers also urged the celebrant to treat the homily as part of the liturgy, aimed at explaining the word of God and drawing out its meaning for the Christian life.
years after the Council, the Year of the Eucharist can serve as an important opportunity for Christian communities to evaluate their progress in this area. It is not enough that the biblical passages are read in the vernacular, if they are not also proclaimed with the care, preparation, devout attention and meditative silence that enable the word of God to touch people’s minds and hearts.

“They recognized him in the breaking of the bread” (cf. Lk 24:35)

14. It is significant that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, duly prepared by our Lord’s words, recognized him at table through the simple gesture of the “breaking of bread.” When minds are enlightened and hearts are enkindled, signs begin to “speak.” The Eucharist unfolds in a dynamic context of signs containing a rich and luminous message. Through these signs the mystery in some way opens up before the eyes of the believer.

As I emphasized in my Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia, it is important that no dimension of this sacrament should be neglected. We are constantly tempted to reduce the Eucharist to our own dimensions, while in reality it is we who must open ourselves up to the dimensions of the Mystery. “The Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation.”

15. There is no doubt that the most evident dimension of the Eucharist is that it is a meal. The Eucharist was born, on the evening of Holy Thursday, in the setting of the Passover meal. Being a meal is part of its very structure. “Take, eat... Then he took a cup and... gave it to them, saying: Drink from it, all of you” (Mt 26:26, 27). As such, it expresses the fellowship which God wishes to establish with us and which we ourselves must build with one another.

Yet it must not be forgotten that the Eucharistic meal also has a profoundly and primarily sacrificial meaning. In the Eucharist, Christ makes present to us anew the sacrifice offered once for all on Golgotha. Present in the Eucharist as the Risen Lord, he nonetheless bears the marks of his passion, of which every Mass is a “memorial”, as the Liturgy reminds us in the acclamation following the consecration: “We announce your death, Lord, we proclaim your resurrection....” At the same time, while the Eucharist makes present what occurred in the past, it also impels us
towards the future, when Christ will come again at the end of history. This “eschatological” aspect makes the Sacrament of the Eucharist an event which draws us into itself and fills our Christian journey with hope.

“I am with you always...” (Mt 28:20)

16. All these dimensions of the Eucharist come together in one aspect which more than any other makes a demand on our faith: the mystery of the “real” presence. With the entire tradition of the Church, we believe that Jesus is truly present under the Eucharistic species. This presence—as Pope Paul VI rightly explained—is called “real” not in an exclusive way, as if to suggest that other forms of Christ’s presence are not real, but par excellence, because Christ thereby becomes substantially present, whole and entire, in the reality of his body and blood. Faith demands that we approach the Eucharist fully aware that we are approaching Christ himself. It is precisely his presence which gives the other aspects of the Eucharist—as meal, as memorial of the Paschal Mystery, as eschatological anticipation—a significance which goes far beyond mere symbolism. The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to remain with us until the end of the world.

Celebrating, worshiping, contemplating

17. The Eucharist is a great mystery! And it is one which above all must be well celebrated. Holy Mass needs to be set at the center of the Christian life and celebrated in a dignified manner by every community, in accordance with established norms, with the participation of the assembly, with the presence of ministers who carry out their assigned tasks, and with a serious concern that singing and liturgical music be suitably “sacred.” One specific project of this Year of the Eucharist might be for each parish community to study the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. The best way to enter into the mystery of salvation made present in the sacred “signs” remains that of following faithfully the unfolding of the liturgical year. Pastors should be committed to that “mystagogical” catechesis so dear to the Fathers of the Church, by which the faithful are helped to understand the meaning of the liturgy’s words and actions, to pass from its signs to the mystery which they contain, and to enter into that mystery in every aspect of their lives.
18. There is a particular need to cultivate a lively awareness of Christ’s real presence, both in the celebration of Mass and in the worship of the Eucharist outside Mass. Care should be taken to show that awareness through tone of voice, gestures, posture and bearing. In this regard, liturgical law recalls—and I myself have recently reaffirmed—the importance of moments of silence both in the celebration of Mass and in Eucharistic adoration. The way that the ministers and the faithful treat the Eucharist should be marked by profound respect. The presence of Jesus in the tabernacle must be a kind of magnetic pole attracting an ever greater number of souls enamoured of him, ready to wait patiently to hear his voice and, as it were, to sense the beating of his heart. “O taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Ps 34:8).

During this year Eucharistic adoration outside Mass should become a particular commitment for individual parish and religious communities. Let us take the time to kneel before Jesus present in the Eucharist, in order to make reparation by our faith and love for the acts of carelessness and neglect, and even the insults which our Saviour must endure in many parts of the world. Let us deepen through adoration our personal and communal contemplation, drawing upon aids to prayer inspired by the word of God and the experience of so many mystics, old and new. The Rosary itself, when it is profoundly understood in the biblical and christocentric form which I recommended in the Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae, will prove a particularly fitting introduction to Eucharistic contemplation, a contemplation carried out with Mary as our companion and guide.

This year let us also celebrate with particular devotion the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, with its traditional procession. Our faith in the God who took flesh in order to become our companion along the way needs to be everywhere proclaimed, especially in our streets and homes, as an expression of our grateful love and as an inexhaustible source of blessings.

III. The Eucharist, source and manifestation of communion

“Abide in me, and I in you” (Jn 15:4)

19. When the disciples on the way to Emmaus asked Jesus to stay “with” them, he responded by giving them a much greater gift: through the Sacrament of the Eucharist he found a way to stay “in” them. Receiving the
Eucharist means entering into a profound communion with Jesus. “Abide in me, and I in you” (Jn 15:4). This relationship of profound and mutual “abiding” enables us to have a certain foretaste of heaven on earth. Is this not the greatest of human yearnings? Is this not what God had in mind when he brought about in history his plan of salvation? God has placed in human hearts a “hunger” for his word (cf. Amos 8:11), a hunger which will be satisfied only by full union with him. Eucharistic communion was given so that we might be “sated” with God here on earth, in expectation of our complete fulfillment in heaven.

One bread, one body

20. This special closeness which comes about in Eucharistic “communion” cannot be adequately understood or fully experienced apart from ecclesial communion. I emphasized this repeatedly in my Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia. The Church is the Body of Christ: we walk “with Christ” to the extent that we are in relationship “with his body.” Christ provided for the creation and growth of this unity by the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. And he himself constantly builds it up by his Eucharistic presence. It is the one Eucharistic bread which makes us one body. As the Apostle Paul states: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). In the mystery of the Eucharist Jesus builds up the Church as a communion, in accordance with the supreme model evoked in his priestly prayer: “Even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:21).

21. The Eucharist is both the source of ecclesial unity and its greatest manifestation. The Eucharist is an epiphany of communion. For this reason the Church sets conditions for full participation in the celebration of the Eucharist.[18] These various limitations ought to make us ever more conscious of the demands made by the communion which Jesus asks of us. It is a hierarchical communion, based on the awareness of a variety of roles and ministries, as is seen by the reference to the Pope and the Diocesan Bishop in the Eucharistic Prayer. It is a fraternal communion, cultivated by a “spirituality of communion” which fosters reciprocal openness, affection, understanding and forgiveness.[19]
“... of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32)

22. At each Holy Mass we are called to measure ourselves against the ideal of communion which the Acts of the Apostles paints as a model for the Church in every age. It is the Church gathered around the Apostles, called by the word of God, capable of sharing in spiritual goods but in material goods as well (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). In this Year of the Eucharist the Lord invites us to draw as closely as possible to this ideal. Every effort should be made to experience fully those occasions mentioned in the liturgy for the Bishop’s “Stational Mass”, which he celebrates in the cathedral together with his presbyters and deacons, with the participation of the whole People of God. Here we see the principal “manifestation” of the Church. It would be praiseworthy to specify other significant occasions, also on the parochial level, which would increase a sense of communion and find in the Eucharistic celebration a source of renewed fervor.

The Lord’s Day

23. In a particular way I ask that every effort be made this year to experience Sunday as the day of the Lord and the day of the Church. I would be happy if everyone would reflect once more on my words in the Apostolic Letter Dies Domini. “At Sunday Mass, Christians relive with particular intensity the experience of the Apostles on the evening of Easter, when the Risen Lord appeared to them as they were gathered together (cf. Jn 20:19). In a sense, the People of God of all times were present in that small nucleus of disciples, the first-fruits of the Church.” During this year of grace, priests in their pastoral ministry should be even more attentive to Sunday Mass as the celebration which brings together the entire parish community, with the participation of different groups, movements and associations.

IV. The Eucharist: principle and plan of “mission”

“They set out immediately” (cf. Lk 24:33)

24. The two disciples of Emmaus, upon recognizing the Lord, “set out immediately” (cf. Lk 24:33), in order to report what they had seen and heard. Once we have truly met the Risen One by partaking of his body and blood, we cannot keep to ourselves the joy we have experienced. The
encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization. I wished to emphasize this in my homily announcing the Year of the Eucharist, based on the words of Saint Paul: “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). The Apostle closely relates meal and proclamation: entering into communion with Christ in the memorial of his Pasch also means sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present in that rite. The dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values.

25. The Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also—in some sense—its plan. For the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian, through whose testimony it is meant to spread throughout society and culture. For this to happen, each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise. Can we not see here a special charge which could emerge from this Year of the Eucharist?

_Giving thanks_

26. One fundamental element of this plan is found in the very meaning of the word “Eucharist”: thanksgiving. In Jesus, in his sacrifice, in his unconditional “yes” to the will of the Father, is contained the “yes”, the “thank you” and the “amen” of all humanity. The Church is called to remind men and women of this great truth. This is especially urgent in the context of our secularized culture, characterized as it is by a forgetfulness of God and a vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency. Incarnating the Eucharistic “plan” in daily life, wherever people live and work—in families, schools, the workplace, in all of life’s settings—means bearing witness that human reality cannot be justified without reference to the Creator: “Without the Creator the creature would disappear.” This transcendent point of reference, which commits us constantly to give thanks for all that we have and are—in other words, to a “Eucharistic” attitude—in no way detracts from the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities, but grounds that autonomy more firmly by setting it within its proper limits.
In this Year of the Eucharist Christians ought to be committed to bearing more forceful witness to God’s presence in the world. We should not be afraid to speak about God and to bear proud witness to our faith. The “culture of the Eucharist” promotes a culture of dialogue, which here finds strength and nourishment. It is a mistake to think that any public reference to faith will somehow undermine the rightful autonomy of the State and civil institutions, or that it can even encourage attitudes of intolerance. If history demonstrates that mistakes have also been made in this area by believers, as I acknowledged on the occasion of the Jubilee, this must be attributed not to “Christian roots,” but to the failure of Christians to be faithful to those roots. One who learns to say “thank you” in the manner of the crucified Christ might end up as a martyr, but never as a persecutor.

The way of solidarity

27. The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church’s life; it is also a project of solidarity for all of humanity. In the celebration of the Eucharist the Church constantly renews her awareness of being a “sign and instrument” not only of intimate union with God but also of the unity of the whole human race.[25] Each Mass, even when celebrated in obscurity or in isolation, always has a universal character. The Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a promoter of communion, peace and solidarity in every situation. More than ever, our troubled world, which began the new Millennium with the spectre of terrorism and the tragedy of war, demands that Christians learn to experience the Eucharist as a great school of peace, forming men and women who, at various levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion.

At the service of the least

28. There is one other point which I would like to emphasize, since it significantly affects the authenticity of our communal sharing in the Eucharist. It is the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society. In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically
affirming the criterion of service: “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (Mk 9:35). It is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the “washing of feet” (cf. Jn 13:1-20): by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally. Saint Paul vigorously reaffirms the impropriety of a Eucharistic celebration lacking charity expressed by practical sharing with the poor (cf. 1Cor 11:17-22, 27-34).

Can we not make this Year of the Eucharist an occasion for diocesan and parish communities to commit themselves in a particular way to responding with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world? I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present—albeit to a different degree—even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.

Conclusion

29. O Sacrum Convivium, in quo Christus sumitur! The Year of the Eucharist has its source in the amazement with which the Church contemplates this great Mystery. It is an amazement which I myself constantly experience. It prompted my Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia. As I look forward to the twenty-seventh year of my Petrine ministry, I consider it a great grace to be able to call the whole Church to contemplate, praise, and adore in a special way this ineffable Sacrament. May the Year of the Eucharist be for everyone a precious opportunity to grow in awareness of the incomparable treasure which Christ has entrusted to his Church. May it encourage a more lively and fervent celebration of the Eucharist, leading to a Christian life transformed by love.

There is room here for any number of initiatives, according to the judgement of the Pastors of the particular Churches. The Congregation for
Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments will not fail to provide some helpful suggestions and proposals. I do not ask, however, for anything extraordinary, but rather that every initiative be marked by a profound interiority. If the only result of this Year were the revival in all Christian communities of the celebration of Sunday Mass and an increase in Eucharistic worship outside Mass, this year of grace would be abundantly successful. At the same time, it is good to aim high, and not to be content with mediocrity, since we know we can always count on God’s help.

30. To you, dear Brother Bishops, I commend this Year, confident that you will welcome my invitation with full apostolic zeal.

30. To you, dear Brother Bishops, I commend this Year, confident that you will welcome my invitation with full apostolic zeal.

Dear priests, who repeat the words of consecration each day, and are witnesses and heralds of the great miracle of love which takes place at your hands: be challenged by the grace of this special Year; celebrate Holy Mass each day with the same joy and fervor with which you celebrated your first Mass, and willingly spend time in prayer before the tabernacle.

May this be a year of grace also for you, deacons, who are so closely engaged in the ministry of the word and the service of the altar. I ask you, lectors, acolytes and extraordinary ministers of holy communion, to become ever more aware of the gift you have received in the service entrusted to you for a more worthy celebration of the Eucharist.

In particular I appeal to you, the priests of the future. During your time in the seminary make every effort to experience the beauty not only of taking part daily in Holy Mass, but also of spending a certain amount of time in dialogue with the Eucharistic Lord.

Consecrated men and women, called by that very consecration to more prolonged contemplation: never forget that Jesus in the tabernacle wants you to be at his side, so that he can fill your hearts with the experience of his friendship, which alone gives meaning and fulfillment to your lives.

May all of you, the Christian faithful, rediscover the gift of the Eucharist as light and strength for your daily lives in the world, in the
exercise of your respective professions amid so many different situations. Rediscover this above all in order to experience fully the beauty and the mission of the family.

I have great expectations of you, young people, as I look forward to our meeting at the next World Youth Day in Cologne. The theme of our meeting—"We have come to worship him"—suggests how you can best experience this Eucharistic year. Bring to your encounter with Jesus, hidden in the Eucharist, all the enthusiasm of your age, all your hopes, all your desire to love.

31. We have before us the example of the Saints, who in the Eucharist found nourishment on their journey towards perfection. How many times did they shed tears of profound emotion in the presence of this great mystery, or experience hours of inexpressible "spousal" joy before the sacrament of the altar! May we be helped above all by the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose whole life incarnated the meaning of the Eucharist. "The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery."[26] The Eucharistic Bread which we receive is the spotless flesh of her Son: *Ave verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine*. In this Year of grace, sustained by Mary, may the Church discover new enthusiasm for her mission and come to acknowledge ever more fully that the Eucharist is the source and summit of her entire life.

To all of you I impart my Blessing as a pledge of grace and joy.

*From the Vatican, on 7 October, the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, in the year 2004, the twenty-sixth of my Pontificate.*


[10] Ibid., 7.


Homily on the 150th anniversary of the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (August 15, 2004)

1. “Que soy era Immaculada Councepciou.” The words which Mary spoke to Bernadette on 25 March 1858 have a particular resonance this year, as the Church celebrates the 150th anniversary of the solemn definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Blessed Pius IX in the Apostolic Constitution Ineffabilis Deus.

   I have greatly wished to make this pilgrimage to Lourdes in order to celebrate an event which continues to give glory to the Triune God. Mary’s Immaculate Conception is the sign of the gracious love of the Father, the
perfect expression of the redemption accomplished by the Son and the beginning of a life completely open to the working of the Spirit.

2. Beneath the maternal gaze of the Blessed Virgin I offer a heartfelt greeting to all of you, dear brothers and sisters, as we gather before the Grotto of Massabielle to sing the praises of her whom all generations call blessed (cf. Lk 1:48).

In particular I greet the French pilgrims and their Bishops, especially the President of the Episcopal Conference and Monsignor Jacques Perrier, the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, whom I thank for his kind words at the start of this celebration. I also greet the Minister of the Interior, who represents the French Government at today’s celebration, and the other civil and military authorities present. My thoughts and prayers go also to the pilgrims assembled here from different parts of Europe and from throughout the world, and to all those spiritually united with us by radio and television. With special affection I greet the sick and all who have come to this holy place to seek consolation and hope. May the Blessed Virgin enable you to sense her presence and give comfort to your hearts!

3. “In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country...” (Lk 1:39). The words of the Gospel story have once more brought before the eyes of our hearts the young maiden of Nazareth as she makes her way to that “city of Judah” where her kinswoman Elizabeth lived, in order to be of help to her.

What strikes us about Mary is above all her loving concern for her elderly relative. Hers is a practical love, one which is not limited to words of understanding but is deeply and personally involved in giving help. The Blessed Virgin does not merely give her cousin something of herself; she gives her whole self, asking nothing in return. Mary understood perfectly that the gift she received from God is more than a privilege; it is a duty which obliges her to serve others with the selflessness proper to love.

4. “My soul magnifies the Lord...” (Lk 1:46). Mary’s sentiments in her meeting with Elizabeth are forcefully expressed in the canticle of the Magnificat. Her words convey the hope-filled expectation of the “poor of the Lord” and at the same time an awareness that God has fulfilled his promises, for he “has remembered his mercy” (cf. Lk 1:54).
This same awareness is the source of that joy of the Virgin Mary which pervades the whole canticle: joy in knowing that she has been “looked upon” by God despite her own “lowliness” (cf. Lk 1:48); joy in the “service” she is able to offer because of the “great things” to which the Almighty has called her (cf. Lk 1:49); joy in her foretaste of the eschatological blessedness promised to “those of low degree” and “the hungry” (cf. Lk 1:52-53).

The Magnificat is followed by silence: nothing is said to us about the three months that Mary stayed with her kinswoman Elizabeth. Yet perhaps we are told the most important thing: that goodness works quietly, the power of love is expressed in the unassuming quietness of daily service.

5. By her words and her silence the Virgin Mary stands before us as a model for our pilgrim way. It is not an easy way: as a result of the fall of our first parents, humanity is marked by the wounds of sin, whose consequences continue to be felt also among the redeemed. But evil and death will not have the last word! Mary confirms this by her whole life, for she is a living witness of the victory of Christ, our Passover.

The faithful have understood this. That is why they throng to this grotto in order to hear the maternal counsels of the Blessed Virgin. In her they acknowledge “the woman clothed in the sun” (Rev 12:1), the Queen resplendent before the throne of God (cf. Responsorial Psalm), ever interceding on their behalf.

6. Today the Church celebrates Mary’s glorious Assumption body and soul into Heaven. The two dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are closely related. Both proclaim the glory of Christ the Redeemer and the holiness of Mary, whose human destiny is even now perfectly and definitively realized in God.

“When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn 14: 3). Mary is the pledge of the fulfillment of Christ’s promise. Her Assumption thus becomes for us “a sign of sure hope and consolation” (cf. Lumen Gentium, 68).

7. Dear brothers and sisters! From this grotto of Massabielle the Blessed Virgin speaks to us too, the Christians of the third millennium. Let us listen to her!
Listen to her, young people who seek an answer capable of giving meaning to your lives. Here you can find that answer. It is a demanding one, yet it is the only answer which is genuinely satisfying. For it contains the secret of true joy and peace.

From this grotto I issue a special call to women. Appearing here, Mary entrusted her message to a young girl, as if to emphasize the special mission of women in our own time, tempted as it is by materialism and secularism: to be in today’s society a witness of those essential values which are seen only with the eyes of the heart. To you, women, falls the task of being sentinels of the Invisible! I appeal urgently to all of you, dear brother and sisters, to do everything in your power to ensure that life, each and every life, will be respected from conception to its natural end. Life is a sacred gift, and no one can presume to be its master.

Finally, Our Lady of Lourdes has a message for everyone. Be men and women of freedom! But remember: human freedom is a freedom wounded by sin. It is a freedom which itself needs to be set free. Christ is its liberator; he is the one who “for freedom has set us free” (cf. Gal 5:1). Defend that freedom!

Dear friends, in this we know we can count on Mary, who, since she never yielded to sin, is the only creature who is perfectly free. I entrust you to her. Walk beside Mary as you journey towards the complete fulfillment of your humanity!

Message for the 20th World Youth Day
2005 (August 6, 2004)

My dear young people!

1. This year we have celebrated the 19th World Youth Day, meditating on the desire expressed by some Greeks who had gone to Jerusalem for the Passover: “We wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21). And here we are now, making
our way to Cologne where, in August 2005, the 20th World Youth Day is to be celebrated.

“We have come to worship him” (Mt 2:2): this is the theme of the next World Youth Day. It is a theme that enables young people from every continent to follow in spirit the path taken by the Magi whose relics, according to a pious tradition, are venerated in this very city, and to meet, as they did, the Messiah of all nations.

It is true to say that the light of Christ had already opened the minds and the hearts of the Magi. “They went their way” (Mt 2:9), says the Evangelist, setting out boldly along unknown paths on a long, and by no means easy, journey. They did not hesitate to leave everything behind in order to follow the star that they had seen in the East (cf Mt 2:2). Imitating the Magi, you young people are also making preparations to set out on a “journey” from every region of the world to go to Cologne. It is important for you not only to concern yourselves with the practical arrangements for World Youth Day, but first of all you must carefully prepare yourselves spiritually, in an atmosphere of faith and listening to the Word of God.

2. “And the star... went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was” (Mt 2:9). The Magi reached Bethlehem because they had obediently allowed themselves to be guided by the star. Indeed, “When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” (Mt 2:10). It is important, my dear friends, to learn to observe the signs with which God is calling us and guiding us. When we are conscious of being led by Him, our heart experiences authentic and deep joy as well as a powerful desire to meet Him and a persevering strength to follow Him obediently.

“And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother” (Mt 2:11). There is nothing extraordinary about this at first sight. Yet that Child was different from any other: He is the only Son of God, yet He emptied Himself of His glory (cf Phil 2:7) and came to earth to die on the Cross. He came down among us and became poor in order to reveal to us His divine glory, which we shall contemplate fully in heaven, our blessed home.
Who could have invented a greater sign of love? We are left in awe before the mystery of a God who lowered himself to take on our human condition, to the point of giving His life for us on the Cross (cf Phil 2:6–8). In His poverty, as Saint Paul reminds us—“though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9), and came to offer salvation to sinners. How can we give thanks to God for such magnanimous goodness?

3. The Magi found Jesus at “Bêth-lehem” which means “house of bread”. In the humble stable in Bethlehem on some straw lay the “grain of wheat” who, by dying, would bring forth “much fruit” (cf Jn 12:24). When speaking of Himself and His saving mission in the course of His public life, Jesus would later use the image of bread. He would say “I am the bread of life”, “I am the bread which came down from heaven”, “the bread that I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh”. (Jn 6: 35.41.51).

Faithfully pursuing the path of our Redeemer from the poverty of the Crib to His abandonment on the Cross we can better understand the mystery of His love which redeems humanity. The Child, laid by Mary in the manger, is the Man-God we shall see nailed to the Cross. The same Redeemer is present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the stable at Bethlehem He allowed himself to be worshiped under the humble outward appearances of a newborn baby, by Mary, by Joseph and by the shepherds; in the consecrated Host we adore Him sacramentally present in his body, blood, soul and godhead, and He offers himself to us as the food of eternal life. The Mass then becomes a truly loving encounter with the One who gave himself wholly for us. Do not hesitate, my dear young friends, to respond to Him when He invites you “to the wedding feast of the Lamb” (cf Rev 19:9). Listen to him, prepare yourselves properly and draw close to the Sacrament of the Altar, particularly in this Year of the Eucharist (October 2004-2005) which I have proclaimed for the whole Church.

4. “They fell down and worshiped Him” (Mt 2:11). While the Magi acknowledged and worshiped the baby that Mary cradled in her arms as the One awaited by the nations and foretold by prophets, today we can also worship Him in the Eucharist, and acknowledge Him as our Creator, our only Lord and Saviour.
“Opening their treasures they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Mt 2:11). The gifts that the Magi offered the Messiah symbolized true worship. With gold, they emphasized His Royal Godhead; with incense, they acknowledged Him as the priest of the New Covenant; by offering Him myrrh, they celebrated the prophet who would shed His own blood to reconcile humanity with the Father.

My dear young people, you too offer to the Lord the gold of your lives, namely, your freedom to follow Him out of love, responding faithfully to His call; let the incense of your fervent prayer rise up to him, in praise of His glory; offer Him your myrrh, that is your affection of total gratitude to Him, true Man, who loved us to the point of dying as a criminal on Golgotha.

5. Be worshippers of the only true God, giving Him pride of place in your lives! Idolatry is an ever-present temptation. Sadly, there are those who seek the solution to their problems in religious practices that are incompatible with the Christian faith. There is a strong urge to believe in the facile myths of success and power; it is dangerous to accept the fleeting ideas of the sacred which present God in the form of cosmic energy, or in any other manner that is inconsistent with Catholic teaching.

My dear young people, do not yield to false illusions and passing fads which so frequently leave behind a tragic spiritual vacuum! Reject the seduction of wealth, consumerism and the subtle violence sometimes used by the mass media.

Worshipping the true God is an authentic act of resistance to all forms of idolatry. Worship Christ: He is the Rock on which to build your future and a world of greater justice and solidarity. Jesus is the Prince of peace: the source of forgiveness and reconciliation, who can make brothers and sisters of all the members of the human family.

6. “And they departed to their own country by another way” (Mt 2:12). The Gospel tells us that after their meeting with Christ, the Magi returned home “by another way”. This change of route can symbolism the conversion to which all those who encounter Jesus are called, in order to become the true worshippers that He desires (cf Jn 4: 23-24). This entails imitating the way He acted by becoming, as the apostle Paul writes, “a
living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”. The apostle then adds that we must not be conformed to the mentality of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds, to “prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (cf Rom 12: 1-2).

Listening to Christ and worshipping Him leads us to make courageous choices, to take what are sometimes heroic decisions. Jesus is demanding, because He wishes our genuine happiness. He calls some to give up everything to follow Him in the priestly or consecrated life. Those who hear this invitation must not be afraid to say “yes” and to generously set about following Him as His disciples. But in addition to vocations to special forms of consecration there is also the specific vocation of all baptized Christians: that is also a vocation to that “high standard” of ordinary Christian living which is expressed in holiness (cf Novo Millennio Ineunte, 31). When we meet Christ and accept His Gospel, life changes and we are driven to communicate our experience to others.

There are so many of our contemporaries who do not yet know the love of God or who are seeking to fill their hearts with trifling substitutes. It is therefore urgently necessary for us to be witnesses to love contemplated in Christ. The invitation to take part in World Youth Day is also extended to you, dear friends, who are not baptized or who do not identify with the Church. Are you not perhaps yearning for the Absolute and in search of “something” to give a meaning to your lives? Turn to Christ and you will not be let down.

7. Dear young people, the Church needs genuine witnesses for the new evangelization: men and women whose lives have been transformed by meeting with Jesus, men and women who are capable of communicating this experience to others. The Church needs saints. All are called to holiness, and holy people alone can renew humanity. Many have gone before us along this path of Gospel heroism, and I urge you to turn often to them to pray for their intercession. By meeting in Cologne you will learn to become better acquainted with some of them, such as St. Boniface, the apostle of Germany, the Saints of Cologne, and in particular Ursula, Albert the Great, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) and Blessed Adolph Kolping. Of these I would like to specifically mention St. Albert and Teresa Benedicta of the Cross who, with the same interior attitude as
the Magi, were passionate seekers after the truth. They had no hesitation in placing their intellectual abilities at the service of the faith, thereby demonstrating that faith and reason are linked and seek each other.

My dear young people as you move forward in spirit towards Cologne, the pope will accompany you with his prayers. May Mary, “Eucharistic woman” and Mother of Wisdom, support you along the way, enlighten your decisions, and teach you to love what is true, good and beautiful. May she lead you all to her Son, who alone can satisfy the innermost yearnings of the human mind and heart.

Go with my blessing!

Castel Gandolfo, August 6, 2004

The Roman Curia

Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and the world (July 31, 2004)

Introduction

1. The Church, expert in humanity, has a perennial interest in whatever concerns men and women. In recent times, much reflection has been given to the question of the dignity of women and to women’s rights and duties in the different areas of civil society and the Church. Having contributed to a deeper understanding of this fundamental teaching of John Paul II,\textsuperscript{[1]} the Church is called today to address certain currents of thought which are often at variance with the authentic advancement of women.
After a brief presentation and critical evaluation of some current conceptions of human nature, this document will offer reflections—inspired by the doctrinal elements of the biblical vision of the human person that are indispensable for safeguarding his or her identity—on some of the essentials of a correct understanding of active collaboration, in recognition of the difference between men and women in the Church and in the world. These reflections are meant as a starting point for further examination in the Church, as well as an impetus for dialogue with all men and women of good will, in a sincere search for the truth and in a common commitment to the development of ever more authentic relationships.

I. The question

2. Recent years have seen new approaches to women’s issues. A first tendency is to emphasize strongly conditions of subordination in order to give rise to antagonism: women, in order to be themselves, must make themselves the adversaries of men. Faced with the abuse of power, the answer for women is to seek power. This process leads to opposition between men and women, in which the identity and role of one are emphasized to the disadvantage of the other, leading to harmful confusion regarding the human person, which has its most immediate and lethal effects in the structure of the family.

A second tendency emerges in the wake of the first. In order to avoid the domination of one sex or the other, their differences tend to be denied, viewed as mere effects of historical and cultural conditioning. In this perspective, physical difference, termed sex, is minimized, while the purely cultural element, termed gender, is emphasized to the maximum and held to be primary. The obscuring of the difference or duality of the sexes has enormous consequences on a variety of levels. This theory of the human person, intended to promote prospects for equality of women through liberation from biological determinism, has in reality inspired ideologies which, for example, call into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent, in a new model of polymorphous sexuality.
3. While the immediate roots of this second tendency are found in the context of reflection on women’s roles, its deeper motivation must be sought in the human attempt to be freed from one’s biological conditioning. According to this perspective, human nature in itself does not possess characteristics in an absolute manner: all persons can and ought to constitute themselves as they like, since they are free from every predetermination linked to their essential constitution.

This perspective has many consequences. Above all it strengthens the idea that the liberation of women entails criticism of Sacred Scripture, which would be seen as handing on a patriarchal conception of God nourished by an essentially male-dominated culture. Second, this tendency would consider as lacking in importance and relevance the fact that the Son of God assumed human nature in its male form.

4. In the face of these currents of thought, the Church, enlightened by faith in Jesus Christ, speaks instead of active collaboration between the sexes precisely in the recognition of the difference between man and woman.

To understand better the basis, meaning and consequences of this response it is helpful to turn briefly to the Sacred Scriptures, rich also in human wisdom, in which this response is progressively manifested thanks to God’s intervention on behalf of humanity.

II. Basic elements of the Biblical vision of the human person

5. The first biblical texts to examine are the first three chapters of Genesis. Here we “enter into the setting of the biblical ‘beginning’. In it the revealed truth concerning the human person as ‘the image and likeness’ of God constitutes the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology.”

The first text (Gen 1:1-2:4) describes the creative power of the Word of God, which makes distinctions in the original chaos. Light and darkness appear, sea and dry land, day and night, grass and trees, fish and birds, “each according to its kind.” An ordered world is born out of differences, carrying with them also the promise of relationships. Here we see a sketch of the framework in which the creation of the human race takes place: “God said ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (Gen 1:26). And then: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he
created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). From the very beginning therefore, humanity is described as articulated in the male-female relationship. This is the humanity, sexually differentiated, which is explicitly declared “the image of God.”

6. The second creation account (Gen 2:4-25) confirms in a definitive way the importance of sexual difference. Formed by God and placed in the garden which he was to cultivate, the man, who is still referred to with the generic expression Adam, experienced a loneliness which the presence of the animals is not able to overcome. He needs a helpmate who will be his partner. The term here does not refer to an inferior, but to a vital helper. This is so that Adam’s life does not sink into a sterile and, in the end, baneful encounter with himself. It is necessary that he enter into relationship with another being on his own level. Only the woman, created from the same “flesh” and cloaked in the same mystery, can give a future to the life of the man. It is therefore above all on the ontological level that this takes place, in the sense that God’s creation of woman characterizes humanity as a relational reality. In this encounter, the man speaks words for the first time, expressive of his wonderment: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23).

As the Holy Father has written with regard to this text from Genesis, “...woman is another ‘I’ in a common humanity. From the very beginning they appear as a ‘unity of the two’, and this signifies that the original solitude is overcome, the solitude in which man does not find ‘a helper fit for him’ (Gen 2:20). Is it only a question here of a ‘helper’ in activity, in ‘subduing the earth’ (cf. Gen 1:28)? Certainly it is a matter of a life’s companion with whom, as a wife, the man can unite himself, becoming with her ‘one flesh’ and for this reason leaving ‘his father and his mother’(cf. Gen 2:24).”

This vital difference is oriented toward communion and was lived in peace, expressed by their nakedness: “And the man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame” (Gen 2:25). In this way, the human body, marked with the sign of masculinity or femininity, “includes right from the beginning the nuptial attribute, that is, the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift and—by means of this gift—fulfills the meaning of his being and his existence.” Continuing his commentary
on these verses of Genesis, the Holy Father writes: “In this peculiarity, the body is the expression of the spirit and is called, in the mystery of creation, to exist in the communion of persons in the image of God.”

Through this same spousal perspective, the ancient Genesis narrative allows us to understand how woman, in her deepest and original being, exists “for the other” (cf. 1 Cor 11:9): this is a statement which, far from any sense of alienation, expresses a fundamental aspect of the similarity with the Triune God, whose Persons, with the coming of Christ, are revealed as being in a communion of love, each for the others. “In the ‘unity of the two’, man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist ‘side by side’ or ‘together’, but they are also called to exist mutually ‘one for the other’... The text of Genesis 2:18-25 shows that marriage is the first and, in a sense, the fundamental dimension of this call. But it is not the only one. The whole of human history unfolds within the context of this call. In this history, on the basis of the principle of mutually being ‘for’ the other in interpersonal ‘communion’, there develops in humanity itself, in accordance with God’s will, the integration of what is ‘masculine’ and what is ‘feminine’.”

The peaceful vision which concludes the second creation account recalls the “indeed it was very good” (Gen 1:31) at the end of the first account. Here we find the heart of God’s original plan and the deepest truth about man and woman, as willed and created by him. Although God’s original plan for man and woman will later be upset and darkened by sin, it can never be abrogated.

7. Original sin changes the way in which the man and the woman receive and live the Word of God as well as their relationship with the Creator. Immediately after having given them the gift of the garden, God gives them a positive command (cf. Gen 2:16), followed by a negative one (cf. Gen 2:17), in which the essential difference between God and humanity is implicitly expressed. Following enticement by the serpent, the man and the woman deny this difference. As a consequence, the way in which they live their sexual difference is also upset. In this way, the Genesis account establishes a relationship of cause and effect between the two differences: when humanity considers God its enemy, the relationship
between man and woman becomes distorted. When this relationship is damaged, their access to the face of God risks being compromised in turn.

God’s decisive words to the woman after the first sin express the kind of relationship which has now been introduced between man and woman: “your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). It will be a relationship in which love will frequently be debased into pure self-seeking, in a relationship which ignores and kills love and replaces it with the yoke of domination of one sex over the other. Indeed the story of humanity is continuously marked by this situation, which recalls the three-fold concupiscence mentioned by Saint John: the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life (cf. 1 Jn 2:16). In this tragic situation, the equality, respect and love that are required in the relationship of man and woman according to God’s original plan, are lost.

8. Reviewing these fundamental texts allows us to formulate some of the principal elements of the biblical vision of the human person.

Above all, the fact that human beings are persons needs to be underscored: “Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God.”[10] Their equal dignity as persons is realized as physical, psychological and ontological complementarity, giving rise to a harmonious relationship of “uni-duality”, which only sin and “the structures of sin” inscribed in culture render potentially conflictual. The biblical vision of the human person suggests that problems related to sexual difference, whether on the public or private level, should be addressed by a relational approach and not by competition or retaliation.

Furthermore, the importance and the meaning of sexual difference, as a reality deeply inscribed in man and woman, needs to be noted. “Sexuality characterizes man and woman not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual, making its mark on each of their expressions.”[11] It cannot be reduced to a pure and insignificant biological fact, but rather “is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love.”[12] This capacity to
love—reflection and image of God who is Love—is disclosed in the spousal character of the body, in which the masculinity or femininity of the person is expressed.

The human dimension of sexuality is inseparable from the theological dimension. The human creature, in its unity of soul and body, is characterized therefore, from the very beginning, by the relationship with the other-beyond-the-self. This relationship is presented as still good and yet, at the same time, changed. It is good from its original goodness, declared by God from the first moment of creation. It has been changed however by the disharmony between God and humanity introduced by sin. This alteration does not correspond to the initial plan of God for man and woman, nor to the truth of the relationship between the sexes. It follows then that the relationship is good, but wounded and in need of healing.

What might be the ways of this healing? Considering and analyzing the problems in the relationship between the sexes solely from the standpoint of the situation marked by sin would lead to a return to the errors mentioned above. The logic of sin needs to be broken and a way forward needs to be found that is capable of banishing it from the hearts of sinful humanity. A clear orientation in this sense is provided in the third chapter of Genesis by God’s promise of a Saviour, involving the “woman” and her “offspring” (cf. Gen 3:15). It is a promise which will be preceded by a long preparation in history before it is realized.

9. An early victory over evil is seen in the story of Noah, the just man, who guided by God, avoids the flood with his family and the various species of animals (cf. Gen 6-9). But it is above all in God’s choice of Abraham and his descendants (cf. Gen 12:1ff) that the hope of salvation is confirmed. God begins in this way to unveil his countenance so that, through the chosen people, humanity will learn the path of divine likeness, that is, the way of holiness, and thus of transformation of heart. Among the many ways in which God reveals himself to his people (cf. Heb 1:1), in keeping with a long and patient pedagogy, there is the recurring theme of the covenant between man and woman. This is paradoxical if we consider the drama recounted in Genesis and its concrete repetition in the time of the prophets, as well as the mixing of the sacred and the sexual found in the religions which surrounded Israel. And yet this symbolism is
indispensable for understanding the way in which God loves his people: God makes himself known as the Bridegroom who loves Israel his Bride.

If, in this relationship, God can be described as a “jealous God” (cf. Ex 20:5; Nahum 1:2) and Israel denounced as an “adulterous” bride or “prostitute” (cf. Hos 2:4-15; Ezek 16:15-34), it is because of the hope, reinforced by the prophets, of seeing Jerusalem become the perfect bride: “For as a young man marries a virgin so shall your creator marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Is 62:5). Recreated “in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy” (Hos 2:21), she who had wandered far away to search for life and happiness in false gods will return, and “shall respond as in the days of her youth” (Hos 2:17) to him who will speak to her heart; she will hear it said: “Your bridegroom is your Creator” (Is 54:5). It is substantially the same reality which is expressed when, parallel to the mystery of God’s action through the male figure of the suffering Servant, the Book of the prophet Isaiah evokes the feminine figure of Zion, adorned with a transcendence and a sanctity which prefigure the gift of salvation destined for Israel.

The Song of Songs is an important moment in the use of this form of revelation. In the words of a most human love, which celebrate the beauty of the human body and the joy of mutual seeking, God’s love for his people is also expressed. The Church’s recognition of her relationship to Christ in this audacious conjunction of language about what is most human with language about what is most divine, cannot be said to be mistaken.

In the course of the Old Testament, a story of salvation takes shape which involves the simultaneous participation of male and female. While having an evident metaphorical dimension, the terms bridegroom and bride—and covenant as well—which characterize the dynamic of salvation, are much more than simple metaphors. This spousal language touches on the very nature of the relationship which God establishes with his people, even though that relationship is more expansive than human spousal experience. Likewise, the same concrete conditions of redemption are at play in the way in which prophetic statements, such as those of Isaiah, associate masculine and feminine roles in proclaiming and prefiguring the work of salvation which God is about to undertake. This salvation orients
the reader both toward the male figure of the suffering Servant as well as to the female figure of Zion. The prophetic utterances of Isaiah in fact alternate between this figure and the Servant of God, before culminating at the end of the book with the mystical vision of Jerusalem, which gives birth to a people in a single day (cf. Is 66: 7-14), a prophecy of the great new things which God is about to do (cf. Is 48: 6-8).

10. All these prefigurations find their fulfillment in the New Testament. On the one hand, Mary, the chosen daughter of Zion, in her femininity, sums up and transfigures the condition of Israel/Bride waiting for the day of her salvation. On the other hand, the masculinity of the Son shows how Jesus assumes in his person all that the Old Testament symbolism had applied to the love of God for his people, described as the love of a bridegroom for his bride. The figures of Jesus and Mary his mother not only assure the continuity of the New Testament with the Old, but go beyond it, since—as Saint Irenaeus wrote—with Jesus Christ “all newness” appears.[13]

This aspect is particularly evident in the Gospel of John. In the scene of the wedding feast at Cana, for example, Jesus is asked by his mother, who is called “woman”, to offer, as a sign, the new wine of the future wedding with humanity (cf. Jn 2:1-12). This messianic wedding is accomplished on the Cross when, again in the presence of his mother, once again called “woman”, the blood/wine of the New Covenant pours forth from the open heart of the crucified Christ (cf. Jn 19:25-27, 34).[14] It is therefore not at all surprising that John the Baptist, when asked who he is, describes himself as “the friend of the bridegroom”, who rejoices to hear the bridegroom’s voice and must be eclipsed by his coming: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:29-30).[15]

In his apostolic activity, Paul develops the whole nuptial significance of the redemption by seeing Christian life as a nuptial mystery. He writes to the Church in Corinth, which he had founded: “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a chaste virgin to her one husband” (2 Cor 11:2).
In the Letter to the Ephesians, the spousal relationship between Christ and the Church is taken up again and deepened in its implications. In the New Covenant, the beloved bride is the Church, and as the Holy Father teaches in his Letter to Families: “This bride, of whom the Letter to the Ephesians speaks, is present in each of the baptized and is like one who presents herself before her Bridegroom: ‘Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her..., that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish’ (Eph 5:25-27).”[16]

Reflecting on the unity of man and woman as described at the moment of the world’s creation (cf. Gen 2:24), the Apostle exclaims: “this mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:32). The love of a man and a woman, lived out in the power of baptismal life, now becomes the sacrament of the love between Christ and his Church, and a witness to the mystery of fidelity and unity from which the “New Eve” is born and by which she lives in her earthly pilgrimage toward the fullness of the eternal wedding.

11. Drawn into the Paschal mystery and made living signs of the love of Christ and his Church, the hearts of Christian spouses are renewed and they are able to avoid elements of concupiscence in their relationship, as well as the subjugation introduced into the life of the first married couple by the break with God caused by sin. For Christian spouses, the goodness of love, for which the wounded human heart has continued to long, is revealed with new accents and possibilities. It is in this light that Jesus, faced with the question about divorce (cf. Mt 19:3-9), recalls the demands of the covenant between man and woman as willed by God at the beginning, that is, before the eruption of sin which had justified the later accommodations found in the Mosaic Law. Far from being the imposition of a hard and inflexible order, these words of Jesus are actually the proclamation of the “good news” of that faithfulness which is stronger than sin. The power of the resurrection makes possible the victory of faithfulness over weakness, over injuries and over the couple’s sins. In the grace of Christ which renews their hearts, man and woman become capable of being freed from sin and of knowing the joy of mutual giving.

12. “For all of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on
Christ... there is neither male nor female”, writes Saint Paul to the Galatians (3:27-28). The Apostle Paul does not say that the distinction between man and woman, which in other places is referred to the plan of God, has been erased. He means rather that in Christ the rivalry, enmity and violence which disfigured the relationship between men and women can be overcome and have been overcome. In this sense, the distinction between man and woman is reaffirmed more than ever; indeed, it is present in biblical revelation up to the very end. In the final hour of present history, the Book of Revelation of Saint John, speaking of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1), presents the vision of a feminine Jerusalem “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2). Revelation concludes with the words of the Bride and the Spirit who beseech the coming of the Bridegroom, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).

Male and female are thus revealed as belonging ontologically to creation and destined therefore to outlast the present time, evidently in a transfigured form. In this way, they characterize the “love that never ends” (1 Cor 13:8), although the temporal and earthly expression of sexuality is transient and ordered to a phase of life marked by procreation and death. Celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom seeks to be the prophecy of this form of future existence of male and female. For those who live it, it is an anticipation of the reality of a life which, while remaining that of a man and a woman, will no longer be subject to the present limitations of the marriage relationship (cf. Mt 22:30). For those in married life, celibacy becomes the reminder and prophecy of the completion which their own relationship will find in the face-to-face encounter with God.

From the first moment of their creation, man and woman are distinct, and will remain so for all eternity. Placed within Christ’s Paschal mystery, they no longer see their difference as a source of discord to be overcome by denial or eradication, but rather as the possibility for collaboration, to be cultivated with mutual respect for their difference. From here, new perspectives open up for a deeper understanding of the dignity of women and their role in human society and in the Church.

III. The importance of

feminine values in the life
13. Among the fundamental values linked to women’s actual lives is what has been called a “capacity for the other.” Although a certain type of feminist rhetoric makes demands “for ourselves,” women preserve the deep intuition of the goodness in their lives of those actions which elicit life, and contribute to the growth and protection of the other.

This intuition is linked to women’s physical capacity to give life. Whether lived out or remaining potential, this capacity is a reality that structures the female personality in a profound way. It allows her to acquire maturity very quickly, and gives a sense of the seriousness of life and of its responsibilities. A sense and a respect for what is concrete develop in her, opposed to abstractions which are so often fatal for the existence of individuals and society. It is women, in the end, who even in very desperate situations, as attested by history past and present, possess a singular capacity to persevere in adversity, to keep life going even in extreme situations, to hold tenaciously to the future, and finally to remember with tears the value of every human life.

Although motherhood is a key element of women’s identity, this does not mean that women should be considered from the sole perspective of physical procreation. In this area, there can be serious distortions, which extol biological fecundity in purely quantitative terms and are often accompanied by dangerous disrespect for women. The existence of the Christian vocation of virginity, radical with regard to both the Old Testament tradition and the demands made by many societies, is of the greatest importance in this regard. Virginity refutes any attempt to enclose women in mere biological destiny. Just as virginity receives from physical motherhood the insight that there is no Christian vocation except in the concrete gift of oneself to the other, so physical motherhood receives from virginity an insight into its fundamentally spiritual dimension: it is in not being content only to give physical life that the other truly comes into existence. This means that motherhood can find forms of full realization also where there is no physical procreation.

In this perspective, one understands the irreplaceable role of women in all aspects of family and social life involving human relationships and caring
for others. Here what John Paul II has termed the genius of women becomes very clear.\[19\] It implies first of all that women be significantly and actively present in the family, “the primordial and, in a certain sense sovereign society”,\[20\] since it is here above all that the features of a people take shape; it is here that its members acquire basic teachings. They learn to love inasmuch as they are unconditionally loved, they learn respect for others inasmuch as they are respected, they learn to know the face of God inasmuch as they receive a first revelation of it from a father and a mother full of attention in their regard. Whenever these fundamental experiences are lacking, society as a whole suffers violence and becomes in turn the progenitor of more violence. It means also that women should be present in the world of work and in the organization of society, and that women should have access to positions of responsibility which allow them to inspire the policies of nations and to promote innovative solutions to economic and social problems.

In this regard, it cannot be forgotten that the interrelationship between these two activities—family and work—has, for women, characteristics different from those in the case of men. The harmonization of the organization of work and laws governing work with the demands stemming from the mission of women within the family is a challenge. The question is not only legal, economic and organizational; it is above all a question of mentality, culture, and respect. Indeed, a just valuing of the work of women within the family is required. In this way, women who freely desire will be able to devote the totality of their time to the work of the household without being stigmatized by society or penalized financially, while those who wish also to engage in other work may be able to do so with an appropriate work-schedule, and not have to choose between relinquishing their family life or enduring continual stress, with negative consequences for one’s own equilibrium and the harmony of the family. As John Paul II has written, “it will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother—without inhibiting her freedom, without psychological or practical discrimination and without penalizing her as compared with other women—to devote herself to taking care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs, which vary with age.”\[21\]
14. It is appropriate however to recall that the feminine values mentioned here are above all human values: the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible. It is only because women are more immediately attuned to these values that they are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values. But, in the final analysis, every human being, man or woman, is destined to be “for the other.” In this perspective, that which is called “femininity” is more than simply an attribute of the female sex. The word designates indeed the fundamental human capacity to live for the other and because of the other. Therefore, the promotion of women within society must be understood and desired as a humanization accomplished through those values, rediscovered thanks to women. Every outlook which presents itself as a conflict between the sexes is only an illusion and a danger: it would end in segregation and competition between men and women, and would promote a solipsism nourished by a false conception of freedom.

Without prejudice to the advancement of women’s rights in society and the family, these observations seek to correct the perspective which views men as enemies to be overcome. The proper condition of the male–female relationship cannot be a kind of mistrustful and defensive opposition. Their relationship needs to be lived in peace and in the happiness of shared love.

On a more concrete level, if social policies—in the areas of education, work, family, access to services and civic participation—must combat all unjust sexual discrimination, they must also listen to the aspirations and identify the needs of all. The defense and promotion of equal dignity and common personal values must be harmonized with attentive recognition of the difference and reciprocity between the sexes where this is relevant to the realization of one’s humanity, whether male or female.

IV. The importance of feminine values in the life of the Church

15. In the Church, woman as “sign” is more than ever central and fruitful, following as it does from the very identity of the Church, as received from God and accepted in faith. It is this “mystical” identity,
profound and essential, which needs to be kept in mind when reflecting on the respective roles of men and women in the Church.

From the beginning of Christianity, the Church has understood herself to be a community, brought into existence by Christ and joined to him by a relationship of love, of which the nuptial experience is the privileged expression. From this it follows that the Church’s first task is to remain in the presence of this mystery of God’s love, manifested in Jesus Christ, to contemplate and to celebrate it. In this regard, the figure of Mary constitutes the fundamental reference in the Church. One could say metaphorically that Mary is a mirror placed before the Church, in which the Church is invited to recognize her own identity as well as the dispositions of the heart, the attitudes and the actions which God expects from her.

The existence of Mary is an invitation to the Church to root her very being in listening and receiving the Word of God, because faith is not so much the search for God on the part of human beings, as the recognition by men and women that God comes to us; he visits us and speaks to us. This faith, which believes that “nothing is impossible for God” (cf. Gen18:14; Lk 1:37), lives and becomes deeper through the humble and loving obedience by which the Church can say to the Father: “Let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Faith continually makes reference to Jesus: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5) and accompanies Jesus on his way, even to the foot of the Cross. Mary, in the hour of darkness, perseveres courageously in faithfulness, with the sole certainty of trust in the Word of God.

It is from Mary that the Church always learns the intimacy of Christ. Mary, who carried the small child of Bethlehem in her arms, teaches us to recognize the infinite humility of God. She who received the broken body of Jesus from the Cross shows the Church how to receive all those in this world whose lives have been wounded by violence and sin. From Mary, the Church learns the meaning of the power of love, as revealed by God in the life of his beloved Son: “he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their heart... he has lifted up the lowly” (Lk 1:51-52). From Mary, the disciples of Christ continually receive the sense and the delight of praise for the work of God’s hands: “The Almighty has done great things for me” (Lk
1:49). They learn that they are in the world to preserve the memory of those “great things,” and to keep vigil in expectation of the day of the Lord.

16. To look at Mary and imitate her does not mean, however, that the Church should adopt a passivity inspired by an outdated conception of femininity. Nor does it condemn the Church to a dangerous vulnerability in a world where what count above all are domination and power. In reality, the way of Christ is neither one of domination (cf. Phil 2:6) nor of power as understood by the world (cf. Jn 18:36). From the Son of God one learns that this “passivity” is in reality the way of love; it is a royal power which vanquishes all violence; it is “passion” which saves the world from sin and death and recreates humanity. In entrusting his mother to the Apostle John, Jesus on the Cross invites his Church to learn from Mary the secret of the love that is victorious.

Far from giving the Church an identity based on an historically conditioned model of femininity, the reference to Mary, with her dispositions of listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise and waiting, places the Church in continuity with the spiritual history of Israel. In Jesus and through him, these attributes become the vocation of every baptized Christian. Regardless of conditions, states of life, different vocations with or without public responsibilities, they are an essential aspect of Christian life. While these traits should be characteristic of every baptized person, women in fact live them with particular intensity and naturalness. In this way, women play a role of maximum importance in the Church’s life by recalling these dispositions to all the baptized and contributing in a unique way to showing the true face of the Church, spouse of Christ and mother of believers.

In this perspective one understands how the reservation of priestly ordination solely to men does not hamper in any way women’s access to the heart of Christian life. Women are called to be unique examples and witnesses for all Christians of how the Bride is to respond in love to the love of the Bridegroom.

Conclusion

17. In Jesus Christ all things have been made new (cf. Rev 21:5). Renewal in grace, however, cannot take place without conversion of heart.
Gazing at Jesus and confessing him as Lord means recognizing the path of love, triumphant over sin, which he sets out for his disciples.

In this way, man’s relationship with woman is transformed, and the three-fold concupiscence described in the First Letter of John (1 Jn 2:16) ceases to have the upper hand. The witness of women’s lives must be received with respect and appreciation, as revealing those values without which humanity would be closed in self-sufficiency, dreams of power and the drama of violence. Women too, for their part, need to follow the path of conversion and recognize the unique values and great capacity for loving others which their femininity bears. In both cases, it is a question of humanity’s conversion to God, so that both men and women may come to know God as their “helper,” as the Creator full of tenderness, as the Redeemer who “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (Jn 3:16).

Such a conversion cannot take place without humble prayer to God for that penetrating gaze which is able to recognize one’s own sin and also the grace which heals it. In a particular way, we need to ask this of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the woman in accord with the heart of God, she who is “blessed among women” (cf. Lk 1:42), chosen to reveal to men and women the way of love. Only in this way, can the “image of God,” the sacred likeness inscribed in every man and woman, emerge according to the specific grace received by each (cf. Gen 1:27). Only thus can the path of peace and wonderment be recovered, witnessed in the verses of the Song of Songs, where bodies and hearts celebrate the same jubilee.

The Church certainly knows the power of sin at work in individuals and in societies, which at times almost leads one to despair of the goodness of married couples. But through her faith in Jesus crucified and risen, the Church knows even more the power of forgiveness and self-giving in spite of any injury or injustice. The peace and wonderment which she trustfully proposes to men and women today are the peace and wonderment of the garden of the resurrection, which have enlightened our world and its history with the revelation that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8,16).

The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, in the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, approved the present Letter, adopted in the
Ordinary Session of this Congregation, and ordered its publication.


+ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Prefect

+ Angelo Amato, SDB
Titular Archbishop of Sila
Secretary


[3] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio (September 14, 1998), 21: AAS 91 (1999), 22: “This opening to the mystery, which came to him [biblical man] through Revelation, was for him, in the end, the source of true knowledge. It was this which allowed his reason to enter the realm of the infinite where an understanding for which until then he had not dared to hope became a possibility”.

Opificio, 16: PG 44, 180; In Canticum Homilia, 2: PG 44, 805-808; St.Augustine, 4, 8: CCL 38, 17.

[5] The Hebrew word *ezër* which is translated as “helpmate” indicates the assistance which only a person can render to another. It carries no implication of inferiority or exploitation if we remember that God too is at times called *ezër* with regard to human beings (cf. Ex 18:4; Ps10:14).


[10] Ibid., 6, l. c., 1663.


[12] Ibid.


[14] The ancient exegetical tradition sees in Mary at Cana the “*figura Synagogae*” and the “*inchoatio Ecclesiae*.”


PRELATE

- Activities of the Prelate
- Pastoral Letters
- Homilies
- Addresses
Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral trips: Spain (Pamplona), France, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Slovenia, Croatia, Spain, (Barcelona)

From June 30 to July 3, Bishop Echevarría was in Pamplona, Spain. On the morning of July 1st, he visited the Medical Research Center (Centro de Investigación Médica Aplicada [CIMA]) and spent some time with patients at the University Hospital. On the 2nd he had a number of meetings with faithful of the Prelature.

On Saturday, July 3, on the way to Bilbao’s Sondika airport, he stopped at Islabe, a center for formation that has recently been remodeled. From Bilbao he flew to París.

In París, on the morning of July 4, he prayed at the Basilica of Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre. Early that afternoon he had a get-together with faithful of the Prelature at Garnelles, a center of Opus Dei in the French capital. Shortly afterwards he flew to the German city of Düsseldorf.

He spent July 4 to 26 at a conference center in Solingen. He left there on July 18 for Belgium, and from there on the 21st went to Holland and the 24th to Cologne, for get-togethers with faithful of the Prelature.

From July 26 to August 4, Opus Dei’s Prelate made a pastoral trip to the Baltic countries and Finland, where he visited with bishops of various dioceses. He took part in two receptions that Archbishop Peter Zurbrüggen, Nuncio Apostolic for the Baltic States and Apostolic Administrator of Estonia, organized at the seat of the Apostolic Nunciature in Vilnius, Lithuania, on July 27, and in Tallinn, Estonia, on the 31st. The second reception was attended by all the priests of the Apostolic Administration of Estonia.

Bishop Echevarría also had pastoral meetings with a large number of families in various cities. He celebrated Mass for the first time in a center
of the Work in Riga, Latvia, a city in which stable activity of the Prelature had begun a few weeks earlier. In Finland, on August 3, he met with members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who are carrying out pastoral work in the vicinity of St. Petersburg, in Russia.

On August 26, Bishop Echevarría arrived in Slovenia. On the following day he went to pray at the national shrine of Marija Pomagaj, Patroness of Slovenia. He was met there by the rector of the Basilica. That morning he was able to greet the archdiocesan administrator in Ljubljana, whose see is currently vacant. In the afternoon he chatted with university students who take part in apostolic activities, and on the 27th he met with a number of Slovenian families in a meeting room of the hotel where he was staying.

On August 28 he went to Trieste, Italy, an hour’s drive from Ljubljana, and there he had a get-together with people who take part in the means of formation provided by the Prelature. On the following day, after additional meetings in Ljubljana, he left for Zagreb.

August 29 to September 1st was spent in Croatia. There he met with faithful of the Prelature and with many others who take part in the means of formation. He also visited the Nuncio and the Cardinal Archbishop and prayed in the Cathedral and in the Marian Shrine of Remete.

From September 16 to 20, Bishop Echevarría was in Barcelona. He met with the Council of the Delegation of the Prelature in Barcelona. He received numerous families and spoke with several sick members of the Prelature. He also visited a number of centers of the Prelature in Barcelona and Tarragona.

On the afternoon of Friday the 17th, in the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom, he officiated with Archbishop Lluis Martinez Sistach of Barcelona, at the blessing of a relief sculpture of St. Josemaría recently installed next to the alcove of our Lady. The sculpture commemorates the prayer of the Founder of Opus Dei in the basilica in June 1946, before beginning his trip to Rome to request canonical approval of the Work from the Holy See.

On Saturday, September 18, in the morning he had a get-together at Viaro High School attended by several thousand people. The Prelate asked
those present to pray and mortify themselves with generosity for His Holiness John Paul II and his intentions.

On Sunday afternoon, in the Cathedral of Tarragona, Archbishop Monteiro de Castro, Papal Nuncio to Spain, Archbishop Martínez Sistach of Barcelona, and Bishop Echevarría conferred episcopal ordination on Most Reverend Jaume Pujol, as the new Archbishop of Tarragon. Also taking part in the ceremony were Bishop Javier Salinas of Tortosa and Bishop Juan Vives of Urgell.

Early on September 20, Bishop Echevarría flew back to Rome from Barcelona’s El Prat airport.

Pastoral Letters

A pastoral letter to the faithful of the Prelature and its cooperators on the occasion of the Year of the Eucharist (Oct. 6, 2004)

A pastoral letter to the faithful of the Prelature and its cooperators on the occasion of the Eucharistic Year, published on the Internet at www.opusdei.org.

“In the most blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself our Pasch and the living Bread which gives life to men through his flesh—that flesh which is given life and gives life through the Holy Spirit.”[1] This mysterious and inexpressible manifestation of God’s love for mankind occupies a privileged place in the
hearts of all Catholics and, expressly, of God’s children in Opus Dei. This is what our beloved Father taught us by his example, his preaching and his writings. He always told us that the Eucharist constitutes “the center and the source of a Christian’s spiritual life.”[2]

Therefore we were filled with joy by the Holy Father’s decision, announced on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, to celebrate a Year of the Eucharist for the universal Church. As you will recall, this period begins during this month of October, with the International Eucharistic Congress being held in Guadalajara, Mexico, and will end in October 2005, with the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will be dedicated to this great Sacrament.

In perfect continuity with the Jubilee of the Year 2000 and in the spirit of the Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, I would like the faithful of the Prelature, its Cooperators, and all those receiving the warmth of the spirit of the Work, to back up the Holy Father’s initiatives every day, and to strive with all our strength to place the Holy Eucharist ever more at the center of our whole life. I also suggest that, during this Year of the Eucharist, staying close to our Lady by praying the Rosary, and moved by St. Josemaría’s example, we make a point of going to the tabernacle to tell Jesus, who has become the Sacred Host, with deep sincerity: “Adoro te devote! I adore you devoutly!” Let us be demanding on ourselves in striving for this goal, since the intensity of our Eucharistic piety determines the value of our life.

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas, quae sub his figuris vere latitas

God so loved the world

We begin with a personal act of heartfelt adoration of the Eucharist, of Christ himself, for in this most holy Sacrament “there is contained, really, truly, and substantially the Body and Blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and, consequently, the whole Christ.” [3] Jesus is present, but he is not seen. He is hidden under the species of bread and wine.[4] “There he is, hidden in the Bread... for love of you.”[5]

Jesus’ love for mankind is the reason he remains among us, in this world, beneath the Eucharistic veil. “Ever since I was a small child, I have perfectly understood the reason for the Eucharist. It is a feeling that we all
share: we always want to remain with those we love.”[6] Our Father, considering the mystery of the love of Christ, whose delight is to be with the children of men (cf. Prov 8:31), who is not willing to leave us orphans (cf. Jn 14:18), who has chosen to remain with us until the end of the world (cf. Mt 28:20), used the example of people who have to part from one another to illustrate the motive for the institution of this Sacrament. “They would like to stay together forever, but duty—in one form or another—forces them to separate.” And not being able to stay together, “they exchange gifts or perhaps a photograph,” but “they can do no more, because a creature’s power is not so great as its desire.” Jesus, God and Man, overcomes these limits through his love for us. “What we cannot do, our Lord is able to do. He leaves us, not a symbol, but a reality. He himself stays with us.”[7] He who was born of Mary in Bethlehem; who worked in Nazareth and journeyed throughout Galilee and Judaea, and died on the Cross on Golgotha; who rose gloriously on the third day and appeared a number of times to his disciples, stays with us now.[8]

The Catholic faith has always professed this identical presence, in part to reject the idle daydreaming of those who excused their lack of Christian spirit by alleging they couldn’t see our Lord as the first disciples did, or who claimed they would behave differently if they were able to meet him physically. “How many now say, I would wish to see his form, his face, his clothes, his shoes. Lo! You see him, you touch him, you eat him. And you indeed desire to see his clothes, but he gives himself to you not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within you. Let no one then approach with indifference, let no one faint-hearted come, but all with burning hearts, all fervent, all vigilant.”[9]

A God who is nearby

St. Josemaría taught us to put our whole heart into our faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, so that our Lord will truly enter into our life and we into his. Thus we will look at him and contemplate him, with eyes of faith, as a person who is really present. He sees us, he hears us, he awaits us, he speaks to us, he draws close to us and seeks us out, he immolates himself for us in the Holy Mass.[10]
Our Father said that people tend to imagine our Lord as “somewhere far off—where the stars shine,” as though he were unconcerned about those he has created. And thus they don’t completely believe that “he is also by our side—always.”[11] Perhaps you have met people who think the Creator is so different from us that he takes no interest in the small or great events that make up a human life. We, however, know that this is not the case, that “though the Lord is high, he looks upon little things” (Ps 137:6 Vulgate). He looks with love upon each of us; everything that is ours is of interest to him.

“The God of our faith is not a distant being who contemplates indifferently the fate of men—their desires, their struggles, their sufferings. He is a Father who loves his children so much that he sends the Word, the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, so that by taking on the nature of man he may die to redeem us. He is the loving Father who now leads us gently to himself, through the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts.”[12] His infinite love and concern for each and every one of us led the Son to remain in the Sacred Host, after becoming man and working and suffering like all mankind, his brothers and sisters. He is truly Emmanuel, God with us. “The Creator has loved his creatures to such an extent that our Lord Jesus Christ, as though all the other proofs of his mercy were insufficient, institutes the Eucharist so that he can always be close to us. We can only understand up to a point that he does so because Love moves him, who needs nothing, not to want to be separated from us.”[13]

Acts of adoration

Before this mystery of faith and love, we fall down in adoration. Only thus can we adequately show that we believe that the Eucharist is truly Christ, really and substantially present: his Body, his Blood, his Soul and his Divinity. Only thus can our love, heartfelt and total, produce an adequate response to the immense love that Jesus has for each of us (cf. Jn 13:1; Lk 22:15). Our adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, since he is God, includes both external gestures and internal devotion, love. It is not a conventional ritual, but a very personal self-offering, which is shown forth externally. “In the Holy Mass we adore our God. We fulfill lovingly the first duty of a creature to his Creator: ‘You shall worship the Lord your
God, and Him only shall you serve’ (Deut 6:13; Mt 4:10). Not the cold, external adoration of a servant, but an intimate esteem and attachment that befits the tender love of a son.”[14]

External signs of adoration—bowing our head or body, genuflecting, prostrating ourselves—are always intended to express reverence and affection, submission, total self-abandonment, a desire for union and service, and, of course, nothing at all of servility. True adoration does not mean separation, distancing, but loving identification. “A child of God treats the Lord as his Father. He is not obsequious and servile, he is not merely formal and well-mannered: he is completely sincere and trusting.”[15]

What great importance St. Josemaría gave to these good manners of piety, no matter how small they might seem! These small details are full of meaning; they reveal people’s inner perceptiveness, and the quality of their faith and love. “How hurried everyone is nowadays in their dealings with God!... Don’t you rush. Don’t make a contortion of your body that is a mere mockery, instead of a pious genuflection... Make a genuflection like this, slowly, reverently, well made. And as you adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, say to him in your heart: Adoro te devote, latens Deitas. I adore you, my hidden God.”[16]

And our Father gave even more importance to the interior attitude of love which should imbue all our external manifestations of Eucharistic devotion. Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament moves from the contemplation of Christ’s love for us to the heartfelt declaration of our love for him as his creatures. But this is not just a matter of words, which are, of course, necessary; it is expressed above all in external and internal deeds of dedication: “Let us tell our Lord, without any need for words, that nothing will be able to separate us from him; that, as he puts himself into our hands, defenseless, under the fragile appearances of bread and wine, he has made us his willing slaves.”[17] Echoing St. John Damascene, St. Thomas Aquinas explains that, in true adoration, the outward humiliation of our body manifests and stirs up interior devotion in our soul, and eagerness to subject ourselves to God and serve him.[18]
We should have no qualms about telling our Lord over and over again that we love and adore him. On the contrary! But we have to make these words meaningful by our deeds of submission and obedience to his will. “God our Lord needs you to tell him, as you receive him each morning: ‘Lord, I believe that it is you. I believe that you are really hidden in the sacramental species! I adore you, I love you!’ And when you visit him in the oratory, repeat it to him again: ‘Lord, I believe that you are really present! I adore you, I love you!’ This is what it means to feel affection for our Lord. Like that we will come to love him more every day. And then continue loving him throughout the day, thinking about and acting on this idea: ‘I am going to finish things well out of love for Jesus Christ, who is presiding over us from the tabernacle’.”[19]

_Tibi se cor meum totum subiicit, quia, te contemplans, totum deficit_

_Marveling at the mystery of love_

> On considering Christ’s self-giving in the Eucharist, how often our Father exclaimed: “He has stayed here for you. He has lowered himself to that extreme for love of you.”[20] On contemplating so much love, the hearts of believers are awestruck, filled with wonder, and we want to respond by giving ourselves completely in return. “I am awed by this mystery of Love.”[21] Let us foster this sentiment, this disposition of our intellect and will, so that we don’t start to take it for granted, but always maintain the simple spirit of a child who marvels at his father’s presents. Let us also say with deep gratitude: “Thank you, Jesus, thank you for having lowered yourself to this extent, in order to satisfy all the needs of our poor hearts.”[22] Then, as a natural consequence, let us break into song, praising our Father God, who has chosen to nourish his children with the Body and Blood of his Son. And let us persevere in our praise, because it will always fall short.[23]

Jesus has remained in the Eucharist to remedy our weaknesses, our doubts, our fears, our anxieties; to cure our loneliness, our perplexity, our discouragement; to accompany us on our way; to uphold us in our struggle. Above all, he is there to teach us to love, to draw us to his Love. “When you contemplate the Sacred Host exposed on the altar in the monstrance, think how great is the love, the tenderness of Christ. My way to
understand it is by thinking of the love I have for you. If I could be far away, working, and at the same time at the side of each one of you, how gladly I would do it!

“But Christ really can do it! He loves us with a love that is infinitely greater than the love that all the hearts of the world could hold. And he has stayed with us so that we can join ourselves at any time to his most Sacred Humanity, and so that he can help us, console us, strengthen us, so that we may be faithful.”[24]

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:8-9). The “logic” of the Eucharist surpasses all human logic. This is so not only because Christ’s presence under the sacramental species is a mystery that we will never fully be able to grasp with our intellect, but also because Christ’s self-giving in the Eucharist completely overflows the littleness of our human heart, and that of all human hearts put together. Such great generosity can seem inexplicable to us, because it is so far removed from the great or small acts of selfishness that so often try to ensnare us.

“He was the greatest madman of all times. What greater madness could there be than to give oneself as he did, and for such people?

“It would have been mad enough to have chosen to become a helpless Child. But even then, many wicked men might have been softened, and would not have dared to harm him. So this was not enough for him. He wanted to make himself even less, to give himself more lavishly. He made himself food, he became Bread.


We have to expand our heart if we are to approach Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Of course, it requires faith; but to be a Eucharistic soul also requires “knowing how to love,” “knowing how to give oneself to others,” imitating, within our smallness, Christ’s self-giving to each and every person. St. Josemaría passed on to us his own personal experience: “The frequency of our visits to our Lord is in proportion to two factors: faith and the involvement of our heart; seeing the truth and loving it.”[26]
In the “school” of St. Josemaría

From an early age our Father had a deep-rooted appreciation for the love Christ shows by remaining with us in this Sacrament. For he had great faith, “faith you could cut with a knife,” and he knew how to love: for us he was “an example of a man who knows how to love.” Therefore, our Lord’s “madness of love” in giving himself to us in this Sacrament “stole his heart,” and he understood the excess of self-abandonment and humiliation that our Lord was led to through his tender and strong affection for each of us. For this reason too, our Father was able to respond to that love without going in for anonymous generalities. He saw himself as personally addressed by Christ, who offered himself up for his life and everyone’s in the Eucharist. And therefore he was in a position to write, referring to the Holy Sacrifice: “Our Mass, Jesus…”[27]

Let us follow the path mapped out by our beloved Founder, every day. With the apostles, let us ask our Lord frequently, as St. Josemaría did: adaugé nobis fidem! Increase our faith! (Lk 17:5). Thus we will learn, in the “school of Mariano”, to give ourselves constantly to others, beginning by serving those we find around us, with vibrant, self-sacrificing love. And we too will learn how to enter into the mystery of Eucharistic love and unite ourselves intimately to Christ’s sacrifice. At the same time, our love for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament will lead us to give ourselves to others especially in ways that won’t be noticed, without drawing attention to ourselves, but going unnoticed, as he did. “Motivated by his own love and by his desire to teach us to love, Jesus came on earth and has stayed with us in the Eucharist.”[28]

We have to imitate Jesus in our own conduct: oblatus est quia ipse voluit (Is 53:7 Vulgate); “he was offered up because he willed it.” We need the same strong inner determination as Christ’s, to give ourselves and surrender ourselves to those we love, to fulfill what they expect and ask for. We need a clean heart, filled with unselfish affection, empty of the disorders introduced by an inflated ego. “The external signs of love should come from the heart and find expression in the witness of a Christian life.... Let our thoughts be sincere, full of peace, self-giving, and service. Let’s be true and clear in what we say—the right thing at the right
time—so as to console and help and especially bring God’s light to others.”[29]

Being truly Eucharistic souls cannot be reduced to the faithful observance of a few ceremonies, which are, certainly, indispensable. It entails the full dedication of one’s heart and life, out of love for the One who gave and continues giving his own life to us with absolute generosity. Let us learn from our Lady the humility and unconditional availability needed to love, welcome and serve Jesus Christ. Let us often meditate, as our beloved Father invited us to, on the fact that she “was conceived without sin to prepare her to receive Christ in her womb.” And let us take on board the question with which that invitation concluded: “If our thanksgiving were in proportion to the difference between the gift and our deserts, should we not turn the whole day into a continuous Eucharist, a continuous thanksgiving?”[30]

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur, sed auditu solo tuto creditur

With the light of faith

How evident is the failure of our senses when faced with the Blessed Sacrament! Sense experience, the natural path for our intellect to grasp what created realities are, does not suffice here. Only our hearing saves us from the shipwreck of the senses before the Eucharist. Only by listening to the Word of God that reveals what the mind cannot perceive through the senses, and accepting it with faith, can we realize that the substance, despite appearances, is not bread but the Body of Christ, not wine but the Blood of the Redeemer.

Our intellect comes close to shipwreck too, because it cannot grasp, and never will, how, while the perceptible appearances—the “species”—of bread and wine remain, the substantial reality is the Body and Blood of Christ. “Does it pass thy comprehending? Faith, the law of light transcending, leaps to things not understood.”[31]

Through the theological virtue of faith we attain, when looking at the Eucharistic mystery, the certainty of what seems impossible to unaided human reason. “Lord, I firmly believe. Thank you for having granted us faith! I believe in you, in this marvel of love that is your Real Presence under the Eucharistic species, after the Consecration, on the altar and in
the tabernacles where you are reserved. I believe more firmly than if I could hear you with my ears, see you with my eyes, touch you with my hands.”[32]

“Our whole faith is brought into play when we believe in Jesus, really present under the appearances of bread and wine.”[33] We activate our faith in the power of the Creator; our faith in Jesus, who says: “This is my Body”, and “This is the cup of my Blood”; faith in the inexpressible action of the Holy Spirit, who intervened in the incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and intervenes in the marvelous Eucharistic conversion, the transubstantiation.

We activate our faith in the Church, who teaches us: “Christ, our Redeemer, declared that which he offered under the species of bread to be truly his own Body (Mt 26:26ff; Mk 14:22ff; Lk 22:19ff; 1 Cor 11:24ff); therefore it has ever been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy Synod now declares it anew, that, by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made 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; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation.”[34]

In continuity with the Council of Trent and with the whole tradition of the Church, the magisterium since then has stressed that “every theological explanation which seeks some understanding of this mystery must, in order to be in accord with Catholic faith, maintain that in the reality itself, independently of our mind, the bread and wine have ceased to exist after the Consecration, so that it is the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus that from then on are really before us.”[35]

I advise you, especially during this Year of the Eucharist, to reread and meditate on some of the more important documents that the Church’s magisterium has dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament.[36] Let us take up these venerable texts with deep gratitude, reinforcing our obedientia fidei to God’s word that is transmitted to us in these teachings with the authority given by Jesus Christ.[37]

*Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius; nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius

Words of life*
Our faith is founded on the words of our Lord himself. The Church has always understood these words exactly as they are, that is, in a fully real sense. After multiplying the loaves and fishes, Christ declared: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51). He was not speaking figuratively. If that had been the case, when he saw that many people, including some of the disciples, took scandal at these words, he would have explained them in another way. But he did not; on the contrary, he reaffirmed them more forcefully: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:54-55). To prevent them from thinking he was going to offer himself as food in a material, physical way, he added: “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63).

These are words of the “Verbum spirans amorem, the Word breathing love”: words of love, which lead to love, because they reveal God’s love for mankind, announcing the Good News: “The Blessed Trinity has fallen in love with man.”[38] How could our concerns not be of interest to him? How could he fail to intervene in our favor when necessary? “Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.’ ‘Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?’ Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Is 49:14-15). God’s concern, his care for each of us, now reaches us through the human Heart of the Incarnate Word. “For Jesus is moved by hunger and sorrow, but what moves him most is ignorance. ‘As he landed he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things’ (Mk 6:34).”[39]

An attitude of trust

On the natural plane, it’s right to emphasize the importance of sense experience as the basis for science and knowledge. But if we keep our eyes “glued to the things of earth,” what our Father described can easily result: “the eyes of our soul grow dull. Reason proclaims itself sufficient to understand everything, without the aid of God.... The human mind
appoints itself the center of the universe, being thrilled with the prospect that ‘you shall be like gods’ (Gen 3:5). So filled with love for itself, it turns its back on the love of God.”[40] In an age that “fosters a worldly climate centering everything on man, an atmosphere of materialism, blind to man’s transcendent vocation,”[41] we have to cultivate in ourselves and spread around us an attitude of openness towards others, of reasonable trust in their word.

Earlier I pointed out that in order to understand the “divine extravagance”[42] of the Eucharist we need to “know how to love.” Reflect now on the fact that it is equally necessary to “know how to listen to” and to trust, above all, in God and his Church. Faith in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament—a submission and at the same time an elevation of our intellect—frees us from the disastrous downward spiral that takes us away from God and also from others. It will defend us against the “conceit” that masks “the worst of all evils.”[43] The act of total submission of our intellect before the uncreated Word, hidden under the species of bread, also helps to prevent our trusting only in our own senses and our own judgment, and reinforces in us the authority of God who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Hidden in the tabernacle is the strength we need, our securesmest refuge against all doubts, fears and worries.[44] This is the Sacrament of the New Covenant, of the eternal Covenant, the ultimate and definitive newness, because no greater self-giving is possible. Without Christ, mankind and the world would remain in darkness. And the lives of Christians also become progressively darker if they separate themselves from him. This Sacrament, with its definitive newness, banishes forever what is old; it dispels unbelief and sin. “Everything harmful, worn out or useless has to be thrown away—discouragement, suspicion, sadness, cowardice. The Holy Eucharist gives the children of God a divine newness, and we must respond in novitate sensus, ‘in the newness of your mind’ (Rom 12:2), renewing all our feelings and actions. We have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord.”[45]

*In Cruce latebat sola Deitas, at hic latet simul et Humanitas*

*With Christ on Calvary*
The celebration of the Eucharist places us on Calvary. For “in the divine sacrifice celebrated in the Mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner, who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross (Heb 9:27). For the victim is one and the same, the same now being offered by the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the Cross, the manner alone of offering being different.” And we have access to Calvary “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.”

Close by Jesus on Golgotha, on another cross, is Dismas, the good thief. We are like him in that we too find ourselves really in the presence of the same Person, taking part in the same dramatic event. We are also like him, or wish to be, in his deep faith in that Person. He believed that Jesus brought with him the Kingdom of God and, repenting, he wanted to be with Christ in that Kingdom. We too believe that Christ is God, the Son of God, who became man to save us. But we differ from that contrite sinner, for he saw Christ’s humanity but not his divinity. We, looking at Jesus in the Eucharist, can see neither his divinity nor his humanity.

The repentant thief

Unlike the other evildoer, Dismas recognizes his guilt, accepts the punishment his offenses deserve and confesses the holiness of Jesus: “This man has done no wrong” (Lk 23:41). We too beseech the Lord to welcome us into his Kingdom. In order to receive him with greater purity in our heart, we confess our faults and ask him for pardon. Also, as the Church teaches us, whenever necessary we go to the sacrament of Reconciliation beforehand, with constructive sorrow.

“If it is not fitting for anyone to approach a sacred ceremony unless he does so in a holy fashion,... all the more diligently should (the Christian) avoid approaching to receive it (the Eucharist) without great reverence and holiness, especially having read those awesome words of the Apostle: ‘For any one who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment upon himself, not discerning the body of the Lord’ (1 Cor 11:29). Therefore, any
one who wishes to go to Communion, needs to be reminded of his command: ‘Let a man examine himself’ (1 Cor 11:28).

“Church custom declares that such examination is necessary and that nobody should approach the Holy Eucharist conscious of mortal sin, without having gone first to sacramental Confession.”[48]

Christ’s humility on the Cross moved Dismas not to be proud, but to accept suffering meekly and reject the temptation to rebel against it. “The humility of Jesus: in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, on Calvary... But more humiliation and more self-abasement in the Sacred Host: more than in the stable, more than in Nazareth, more than on the Cross.”[49] Let us imitate the latro poenitens, the repentant thief, in his humble attitude. In fact we should be even humbler, because the example of self-abasement in the Eucharist which we contemplate through our faith is even greater than the self-abasement Dismas saw with his eyes on Calvary. When our ego rises up in pride, claiming a right to comfort, sensuality, recognition or gratitude, the remedy is to look at Christ Crucified, to go to the tabernacle, to participate sacramentally in his sacrifice. This was the conclusion our Father came to, when he ended that point of The Way with the words: “That is why I must love the Mass so much!”[50]

Teacher of all the virtues

St. Thomas Aquinas writes that Christ on the Cross exemplifies every virtue: “Passio Christi sufficit ad informandum totaliter vitam nostram.”[51] All we have to do is to turn our eyes to the Crucified and we will learn whatever we need in this life. He goes on: “Nullum enim exemplum virtutis abest a Cruce.”[52] There is no virtue which is not shown there, and there are plenty of examples of each of them: fortitude, patience, humility, detachment, charity, obedience, contempt for honors, poverty, self-abandonment...

We can say the same about the Eucharist: in it, Christ teaches all-surpassing love and humility. In this divine Gift, we can also strengthen our practice of the other Christian virtues. “In the Holy Eucharist and in prayer we have a school where we learn how to live, serving all souls with cheerful service; how to govern, serving too; how to obey freely, wanting to do so;
how to seek unity, while respecting variety and diversity, through a close, personal identification."

In a special way the Holy Eucharist teaches us the virtues we need to cultivate every day at work and in our family, in the everyday situations facing ordinary people: being able to wait patiently, welcoming everyone, always being available... The silence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is particularly eloquent for those who, like us, are called to sanctify ourselves nel bel mezzo della strada, in the middle of the street, busy with countless apparently unimportant occupations. From his silence there, he points out to us that ordinary life offers us, through the humility in which it is lived, a constant possibility of sanctification and apostolate. It holds all the treasure and strength of God, who intervenes and converses with us at every moment, and is interested even in the falling of one hair of our head (cf. Mt 10:29).

When we contemplate Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, we become aware of the need to act with purity of intention, and to have no other will than that of fulfilling what God wants, which is to serve souls so that they may get to Heaven. We discover how important it is to give ourselves to others, spending our lives accompanying all mankind, our brothers and sisters, without fuss, patiently and discreetly; with friendship and affection shown in deeds that may be small, but are definite and useful; making our time available and having an openness of heart which leads us to address to all, to each individual, the appropriate words, the advice and consolation they need, a point of doctrine, fraternal correction.

“He has so abased Himself that He accepts everything; He exposes Himself to everything—to sacrilege, to blasphemy and to the cold indifference of so many people—in order to offer even one man the chance of hearing the beating of his Heart in his wounded side.”

_Dedication to the service of others_

Looking at Jesus’ Real Presence in the tabernacle, we understand the inexpressible effectiveness of “going unnoticed and disappearing”, which does not involve falling into a dolce far niente, “sweetly doing nothing”, isolating ourselves from others, ceasing to influence our environment and events in our own family, professional or social spheres. It leads us, instead,
to give all the glory to God and to respect other people’s freedom; and also to impel them towards our Lord, not in a noisy way, but with the “coercion” of our own self-giving and of virtue that is cheerful and generous.

Looking at our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, we realize how good it is for us to “become bread”; so that others can feed on what we have—our prayer, our spirit of service, our joy—so as to go forward along the path to holiness. We become convinced of the need for “hidden and silent sacrifice,”[55] a sacrifice without spectacle or grandiose gestures. “Jesus has remained within the Eucharist for love... of you. He has remained, knowing how men would treat him..., and how you would treat him. He has remained so that you could eat him, so that you could visit him and tell him what’s happening to you; and so that you could talk to him as you pray before the tabernacle, and as you receive him sacramentally; and so that you could fall in love more and more each day, and make other souls—many souls!—follow the same path.”[56]

In the Eucharist, Jesus shows with divine eloquence that, in order to be like him, we have to give ourselves completely and unhesitatingly to others, until we turn our life’s journey into one of constant service. “You will become a saint if you have charity, if you manage to do the things which please others and do not offend God, though you find them hard to do.”[57]

Ambo tamen credens atque confitens, peto quod petivit latro pœnitens

Following the rhythm of contrition

Let us go back to the scene on Calvary, to listen to the good thief’s petition, which moved St. Josemaría so profoundly when he meditated on the Adoro te devote. “Many times have I repeated that verse of the Eucharistic hymn: Peto quod petivit latro pœnitens, and it always fills me with emotion: to ask like the penitent thief did!

He recognized that he himself deserved that awful punishment... And with a word he stole Christ’s heart and opened up for himself the gates of heaven.”[58]

Especially in his last years, seeing the difficulties of the Church, our Father turned with all his soul to God’s mercy, begging for the
understanding, the love of God for himself and for everyone. He did not base his claim on any merits, which he thought he didn’t have. “It has all been the Lord’s doing,” he would say with conviction. He didn't appeal to motives of justice in order to obtain the Lord’s help in trials and tribulations. He sought refuge in God’s compassion. Thus, from his faith in Christ, he passed to contrition: to constant and cheerful conversion. That was our Father’s approach: being quite sure that cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies (Ps 50[51]:19), God does not despise a contrite and humbled heart.

Now, through his intercession in heaven, we must make our own this rhythm of faith and sorrow which is an unmistakable sign of genuine interior life. Prayer before the Eucharist will strengthen our hope, our trust in the Lord’s mercy. It will do so in many ways; among others, by helping us discover our wretchedness, so that we can take it to the foot of the Cross and so, with our struggle against our defects, we will be able to raise our Lord’s victorious Cross over our lives, our weaknesses.

**Trusting in God’s mercy**

Dismas found God’s mercy and grace by transforming the activity which until then had been his “profession”: assaulting people and stealing what they had. On the cross, through sincere faith and sorrow, he “assaulted” Christ, “stole” his heart and entered with him into glory. Our Father passed on to us his “loving habit of ‘storming’ tabernacles.”[59] He taught us, above all, to unite our sanctified work to the offering which Jesus makes of himself in the Mass and thus work with the strength which flows from his sacrifice.

We too should share in the experience of the latro pœnitens: we look to the Lord’s mercy for our sanctification. When we receive his forgiveness and grace, we reflect these gifts in the fraternity we show towards everyone, for holiness, perfection, is directly related to mercy. Our Lord himself tells us so: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48); and Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36).

But we must always remember that “Mercy is more than simply being compassionate. Mercy is the overflow of charity, which brings with it also an overflow of justice.”[60] It translates simply into giving and devoting
ourselves to other people, as the Good Samaritan did: without neglecting our own duties and, at the same time, making up our mind to sacrifice our love of comfort and to leave aside little—or not so little—personal plans and interests. “Mercy means keeping one’s heart totally alive, throbbing in a way that is both human and divine, with a love that is strong, self-sacrificing and generous.”[61]

Seen this way, this active mental disposition can be applied analogously to Christ, who is both God and Man. It would be absurd to say that we could be merciful to God in himself, but it isn’t so with regard to the Humanity of Jesus, for our Lord himself has told us that he sees the mercy we show to his human brothers and sisters, even the least of them, as shown to himself (cf. Mt 25:40). Moreover, we can in some way practice mercy—by way of atonement—towards the Humanity of our Lord hidden in the tabernacle, where he is “the Great Solitary one.” It is a deep act of love and piety to visit him in the “prison of love,” where he has remained “willingly locked up”[62] because he has wanted to be with us always, until the end.

How many opportunities open up for us to “treat him well,” to keep him company, to show him our love and affection! St. Josemaría encouraged us to do so: “Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, you lovingly await us in so many lonely tabernacles. I ask that in our Centers we may always treat you ‘well’, surrounding you with our affection, our prayer, our reparation, the incense of little victories, and sorrow for our defeats.”[63]

Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor, Deum tamen meum te confiteor

Thomas’ initial attitude

A week after Jesus’ resurrection, in the Cenacle, Thomas looks at our Lord, who shows him his wounds and tells him: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing” (Jn 20:27). In the Eucharist, we also find ourselves really before his glorious Body, which is at the same time in the state of a victim—Christus passus—through the sacramental separation of the Body and the Blood. “The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Savior’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).”

We can imagine that, when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane and afterwards, faced with the “human failure” of Christ, the Apostle Thomas must have felt disconcerted, let down, hopeless. Perhaps his interior collapse was particularly acute, and that was why he found it harder than the other ten Apostles to accept the fact of the Lord’s resurrection. He found it particularly difficult to believe once again in Jesus, to hope in him once more, to be filled anew with real enthusiasm; in short, to love him and feel loved by him. And he laid down conditions.

God has revealed himself progressively, and in some ways the history of Revelation is echoed on the personal level in each individual’s journey of faith. Each new step along that journey also means a “new” abandonment, which is harder, and requires a greater identification with Christ, dying more and more to one’s own self. And it is good that we should be forewarned, because we too may find ourselves tempted to react as St. Thomas did: an attitude of disbelief, unwillingness to believe unhesitatingly, to believe even more. Let’s not be surprised at this, nor afraid. To get over this difficulty, let us repeat with greater faith before the tabernacle and on other occasions: Dominus meus et Deus meus! My Lord, and my God! (Jn 20:28).

The Apostles believed in Jesus as a prophet and emissary of God; as the Messiah and Savior of Israel; as the Son of God. But they had formed an inaccurate idea of how his salvation would be enacted, and what form their Master’s Kingdom would take. They did not entirely understand the announcements Christ made to them, at least three times, of his passion and death. Then, partly through their indolence and partly due to the whole tragedy of the passion, events brought them violently face to face with God’s plan, and they all fell away, save St. John. And they found it hard, St. Thomas especially so, to accept the glorious reality that Christ had risen. But our Lord’s different apparitions overcame their reservations, and Thomas himself got over his spiritual feebleness, as I have said, with a marvelous act of faith and love: Dominus meus et Deus meus!

*In times of trial*
We too may find in ourselves, for different reasons, an initial resistance to believe, through an accumulation of negative experiences; through the antagonism of an anti-Christian environment; or through some “unexpected Cross,”[65] which comes to us more crudely and concretely: “because God asks all of us for total self-renunciation, and sometimes the poor man of clay from which we are made, rebels—especially if we have allowed our ego to get into our work, which should be for God.”[66]

We can always overcome situations of this kind, with God’s grace, if we see them as what they are: invitations to draw closer to God, to get to know him better and love him more, to serve him more effectively. The surest means to overcome them is to meet the crucified and glorified Christ: Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In a very special way, therefore, the moment will have come for us to go to the tabernacle to speak to our Lord, who shows us his wounds as proof of his love; and, with faith in those wounds which we do not contemplate physically, we will discover, with the Apostles, the mystery of how it was “necessary that Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory” (Lk 24:26). We will accept the Cross more clearly as a divine gift, and so understand our Father’s exhortation: “Let us be determined to see the glory and good fortune that are hidden in suffering.”[67]

To the wounds of Christ

My daughters and sons, once again I tell you we must not be surprised or frightened if we come across especially hard situations, in which the chiaroscuro, the light and darkness of the faith, comes to us more explicitly in its dimension of darkness; occasions when perhaps it is more difficult to recognize Christ, so that we cannot even get a glimmer of where the path willed by God is leading. This kind of interior trials can at times be due to our human wretchedness, to our unresponsiveness. Often, though, it is not so; instead, they are part of a plan willed by God to identify us with Jesus Christ, to sanctify us.

The time has come to “go”, as the Apostle Thomas did, to the wounds of Christ. This is how St. Josemaría explains it: “but don’t forget that being with Jesus means we shall most certainly come across his Cross. When we abandon ourselves into God’s hands, he frequently permits us to taste sorrow, loneliness, opposition, slander, defamation, ridicule, coming both
from within and from outside. This is because he wants to mould us into his own image and likeness. He even tolerates that we be called lunatics and be taken for fools.

“This is the time to love passive mortification which comes, hidden perhaps or barefaced and insolent, when we least expect it....

“When we really come to admire and love the most sacred Humanity of Jesus, we will discover each of his Wounds, one by one. When we undergo periods of passive purgation, that we find painful and hard to bear, periods when we shed sweet and bitter tears, which we do our best to hide, we will feel the need to enter into each one of his most Holy Wounds: to be purified and strengthened, rejoicing in his redeeming Blood....

“Go as the spirit moves you: unburden in his Wounds all your love, both human and... divine. This is what it means to seek union, to feel that you are a brother of Christ, sharing his blood, a child of the same Mother, for it is She who has brought us to Jesus."[68]

Not only in times of trial, but always, let us perseveringly seek to meet the risen Christ, who awaits us on the altar and in the tabernacle. With what confidence and security we should go to pray before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to beg, with the daring of children, for so many needs and intentions! The Apostle St. Thomas made that meeting a condition for his belief; we, now, by the grace of God, have the certainty that when we place ourselves before Jesus all our spiritual difficulties are solved. We see neither our Lord’s Humanity nor his Divinity, but we believe firmly, and we go to him. He “sees us and hears us, he is waiting for us and presides over us from the tabernacle where he is truly present, hidden under the sacramental species.... ‘What is the matter?’ he asks, and we reply, ‘It’s my...’ At once there is light, or at least the acceptance of his will, and inner peace.”[69] That way we will be faithful and we will feel the desire and the strength to tell the whole world, with no human respect, naturally and urgently, that we have found Christ, that we have touched him, that he is alive! We taste, as did St. Josemaría, the truth and the joy of those words, Iesus Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in sæcula! (Heb 13:8), Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and for ever.

Fac me tibi semper magis credere, in te spem habere, te diligere
Eucharistic souls: faith, love, hope

Growth in the spiritual life is directly related to growth in Eucharistic devotion. How forcefully our Father preached this truth! As the fruit of his own spiritual experience, he encourages each of us: “Be a Eucharistic soul! If the center around which your thoughts and hopes turn is the tabernacle, then, my child, how abundant the fruits of your sanctity and apostolate will be!”[70]

The desire for holiness and apostolic zeal find their surest source and foundation in Eucharistic contemplation. “I cannot see how anyone could live as a Christian and not feel the need for constant friendship with Jesus in the word and in the bread, in prayer and in the Eucharist. And I easily understand the ways in which successive generations have expressed their love for the Eucharist.”[71]

When God approaches someone to attract them to himself, they should prepare themselves with more acts of faith, hope and love. They should direct their life more decisively towards God, turning it into one of greater prayer, more penance, more frequent reception of the sacraments, more Eucharistic devotion. That was what our Father always did, especially from the time when our Lord began to manifest himself to his soul, with those inklings of love. Early on, when he was at St. Charles’ Seminary, he spent whole nights in prayer, accompanying our Lord in the tabernacle; as the days went by, he felt a growing urge to spend more time with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

The Christian path is essentially the path of the theological virtues: the fruit of supernatural knowledge (faith), of a loving tension towards the infinite Good that is the Blessed Trinity (hope), and of communion in charity. And its most sublime expression is Eucharistic adoration, because in it we are adoring God just where he has chosen to come closest to us. At the same time, and for the same reason, it proves to be the best means of growing in those three virtues. Our Father prayed for those virtues every day, precisely in the Holy Mass, when he raised up Jesus, sacramentally present in the consecrated Host and in the chalice with his Blood: adauge nobis fidem, spem, caritatem! Increase our faith, our hope, and our love!
Faith, hope and charity are supernatural virtues, which God alone can infuse into souls, which he alone can intensify. But this does not mean that our reception of these divine gifts exempts us from personal collaboration, because the Almighty never imposes his love in any of his plans: “God does not want slaves, but children. He respects our freedom.”[72] And so, as a rule, he thinks it fitting that his inexpressible action should be welcomed and accompanied by an effort on the part of his creatures. We should be filled with wonder at the importance he attributes to us.

**God's tenderness**

We can discover that Christ’s hiddenness in the sacramental species, which responds to the requirements of the sacramental economy, also fits in with God’s express desire not to force human freedom. By hiding himself, our Lord invites us to seek him, while he puts himself in our way, he “comes out to meet us.”[73] How often this happened to St. Josemaría, who, without realizing it, without specifically seeking it, found himself “mulling over” words of Scripture that shed light on aspects of his work, showed him the will of God, answered problems and doubts which he had put to his Lord! “The Gospel tells us that Jesus hid himself when they wanted to make him king after he had worked the miracle.

“Lord, you make us share in the miracle of the Eucharist. We beg you not to hide away. Live with us. May we see you, may we touch you, may we feel you. May we want to be beside you all the time, and have you as the King of our lives and of our work.”[74]

When Christian life is centered on faith, hope and charity, it tends by its very nature always to make us grow, to increase our response: we are not satisfied with what we are already doing. And so, one sign that we truly love God is to judge that we love him little, that we need to spend more time with him each day. Only people who have little love, think that they already love a lot. Our Father appeals to us in strong words: “What was that?... You can't do more!? Couldn't it be that... you can't do less?”[75] Let us respond, going once again to Christ our Lord, hidden in the tabernacle: Fac me tibi semper magis credere, in te spem habere, te diligere! Make me always believe in you more, hope in you more, love you more!
This tension to reach “more” finds its center and root—as does the whole of Christian living—in the Eucharist. Because Jesus in the Eucharist is the summit of

the crescendo of God’s self-giving to mankind, and when we become identified with him he communicates to us the same crescendo in self-giving, and does so suaviter et fortiter, gently and strongly, taking us, as it were, by the hand. This is how St. Josemaría put it: “You have started to visit the Blessed Sacrament every day, and I am not surprised to hear you say, ‘I have come to love the sanctuary light madly’.”[76] So, before the tabernacle, let us beg Jesus with fervent piety to grant us all, more and more, the “work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope” (1 Thess 1:3).

O memoriale mortis Domini, panis vivus, vitam præstans homini

*Memorial of the Sacrifice of the Cross*

The Eucharist is the memorial of the death of the Lord and the banquet where Christ gives us his body and blood as food. Pope Pius XII teaches: “According to the plan of divine wisdom, the sacrifice of our Redeemer is shown forth in an admirable manner by external signs which are the symbols of His death. For by the “transubstantiation” of bread into the Body of Christ and of wine into His Blood, His Body and Blood are both really present: now the Eucharistic species under which He is present symbolize the actual separation of His Body and Blood. Thus the commemorative representation of His death, which actually took place on Calvary, is repeated in every sacrifice of the altar, seeing that Jesus Christ is symbolically shown by separate symbols to be in a state of victimhood.”[77]

Concerning this doctrine, Pope John Paul II teaches: “The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it. What is repeated is its memorial celebration, its “commemorative representation” (*memorialis demonstratio*), 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.”[78]

The Holy Mass, therefore, must never be seen as a mere remembrance
of the saving event on Golgotha, for it makes it sacramentally present. Every sacrament effects what it signifies; thus, the Mass signifies and makes present the very sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. It brings to us the living memorial of our Lord’s passion and death. “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the Cross remains ever present.”[79] In the Sacrifice of the Mass, we unite all we have to the offering in which Christ, the Head of the Church, gave himself to God the Father, in adoration, thanksgiving, satisfaction for the sins of mankind, and petition for the needs of the world.

Center and root of the spiritual life

Our Founder, in his catechesis, always stressed the intimate relationship that exists between the Last Supper, the Cross and the Mass. At a time when, in not a few places, the sacrificial reality of the Eucharist was being obscured, he emphasized especially the infinite value of the Holy Sacrifice. In words that everyone could understand, he once said: “I can perfectly make out the institution of the Holy Eucharist, which is a moment when Christ showed divine and human love, and his Sacrifice on the wood of the Cross. At the Last Supper Christ was ‘able to suffer,’ he hadn’t yet suffered; on Calvary he is ‘suffering,’ with the gesture of the Eternal Priest. Jesus hangs there, fixed with nails, after having sanctified the world with his footsteps, and he dies for love of each of us: all of his Blood is the price of our soul, of each and every soul.”[80]

Through this immolation, the Lord has obtained eternal redemption for us (cf. Heb 9:12). “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.”[81]

St. Josemaría welcomed this legacy of faith and made it, in all its implications, deeply part of his life. Following the counsel and example of the Holy Fathers, he sought to imitate always, throughout the whole of each day, what takes place in the Mass, and he encouraged others to do
likewise: “Become identified with that Jesus, the Host, who offers himself on the altar!” He always practiced what he preached: the Holy Mass, as the center and root of the spiritual life of the Christian, was the foundation of each of his days. He meditated on this and passed it on to us in the light of his profound contemplation of the Eucharistic Mystery.

“The Mass is, I insist, an action of God, of the Trinity. It is not a merely human event. The priest who celebrates fulfills the desire of our Lord, lending his body and his voice to the divine action. He acts, not in his own name, but in persona et in nomine Christi: in the Person of Christ and in his name.

“Because of the Blessed Trinity’s love for man, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist brings all graces to the Church and to mankind. This is the sacrifice announced by the prophet Malachy ... It is the sacrifice of Christ, offered to the Father with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit—an offering of infinite value, which perpetuates the work of the redemption in us and surpasses the sacrifices of the old law.

“The holy Mass brings us face to face with one of the central mysteries of our faith, because it is the gift of the Blessed Trinity to the Church. It is because of this that we can consider the Mass as the center and the source of a Christian’s spiritual life. It is the aim of all the sacraments. The life of grace, into which we are brought by Baptism, and which is increased and strengthened by Confirmation, grows to its fullness in the Mass.”

Making an effort to respond fully to the gift of the Holy Eucharist

I stress that the celebration of the Eucharist should become the center and root of the spiritual life of a son or daughter of God, since this Sacrament marks the culmination of the sacrifice which the Son of God made of his life. Besides setting this sacrifice before our eyes and enabling us to imitate it in our daily response, the celebration of Mass also offers us the grace of the Redemption and an opportunity to give our lives, like Christ, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Receiving this inexpressible gift obliges us to make an effort to respond to it. We must do all we can to unite ourselves and everything that is ours with Jesus’ offering to God the Father. “In the Holy Sacrifice of the altar, the priest takes up the Body of our God, and the Chalice containing his
Blood, and raises them above all the things of the earth, saying: Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso—through my Love! With my Love! In my Love!

“Join with the action of the priest. Or rather, make that act of the priest a part of your life.”[84]

I want to underline the fact that our Father did not simply teach that the Mass is the center and root of the interior life. He showed us how to respond personally to the gift the Trinity gives us in the Holy Sacrifice, so that our personal spiritual struggle really orbits around the Mass, feeds on that sacrifice and is rooted in that holocaust.

He advised us, among other things, that he found it very useful to divide the day into two—the first half to prepare for the Mass, and the second to give thanks for it. During the night, he used every waking moment to keep up his conversation with God, with an emphasis on the holy Eucharist. He tried especially to savor and find meaning in each gesture and word of the different parts that make up the Eucharistic celebration. He always found new facets in this exercise and united it to acts of faith, hope and love and to specific situations and intentions. His homily “The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love” is a great help in this regard.[85]

Everything that flows with Christ’s grace, like divine sap from the Eucharistic root, also demands, as I have said, an effort on our part. St. Josemaría urges us on to undertake this wonderful daily combat: “Keep struggling, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the centre and the root of your interior life, and so your whole day will turn into an act of worship—an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. This will then overflow in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the offering up of your professional work and your family life.”[86]

Communion with Christ and unity of the Church

The Sacrifice of the Altar combines the aspects of a banquet and a sacrifice. Through the priest Christ offers himself as a victim to God the Father, and the Father himself gives Christ to us as our food. Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is panis filiorum,[87] “bread for the children”. Communion with the Body and Blood of our Lord fills us with a specific
grace that produces in our soul effects similar to those produced by food in
the body “sustaining, building up, restoring and delighting.”[88]

However, whereas in physical nourishment the body assimilates what is
eaten, here the opposite happens. We are assimilated by Christ into his
Body; we are transformed into him. “Our participation in the Body and
Blood of Christ transforms us into that which we receive.”[89]

The Eucharist operates in the Church as the sacrament of unity, since
when we all eat the same Bread we become one Body. Mass and Holy
Communion build up the Church. They construct its unity and make it
firm and cohesive. “Those who receive the Eucharist are united more
closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites all the faithful in one body—the
Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation
into the Church, already achieved by Baptism. In Baptism we have been
called to form but one body (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). The Eucharist fulfills this
call.”[90]

My daughters and sons: it is very important for us to be united with the
visible Head when we celebrate or participate in this holy Sacrifice! We all
want to be very close to the Pope, the Head of the universal Church; you
should be very united to the Bishops, the Heads of each particular Church,
and very especially to this Father of yours whom our Lord has chosen to
place as the visible Head and principal of unity in this “little part of the
Church” that is the Work.

_Praesta meæ menti de te vivere, et te illi semper dulce sapere_

_Life in Christ_

“By virtue of its union with the Word, Christ’s flesh is life-giving.”[91] St.
Luke writes: “All the crowd sought to touch him, for power came forth
from him and healed them all” (Lk 6:19). Likewise the Eucharistic Bread
is not only living but life-giving. It gives us divine life in Christ. In
receiving it, we can each say with St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live but
Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

_Praesta meæ menti de te vivere…_ Grant that my soul may live by you…
The invitation contained in this verse is for everything in us to be
nourished always by living in Christ, so that we behave in a way that is
completely faithful to his love, and persevere in savoring his sweetness. May our joy and our “pleasure” be in Christ. May we go to him “like iron drawn by a magnet.”[92]

Our sincere desire, our petition to do so, is a powerful help towards wanting and fostering unity of life. What that means is not having more than one Lord in our soul (cf. Mt 6:24), seeking only one thing (cf. Lk 10:42), and submitting totally to one Love, who is our God. It means wanting only what God wants, and accepting everything else because God wants it and in the way and to the extent that pleases him. It means being so identified with Christ that the fulfillment of his will is expressed in us as an essential characteristic of our own personality. It means having the same sentiments as Christ (cf. Phil 2:5). To achieve that, let us ask him for it with St. Josemaría: “May I see with your eyes, my Christ, my dear Jesus.”[93]

We Christians should not forget that with our Lord, omnia sancta, all things are holy, but without him, mundana omnia, all things are worldly. Let us not be fooled by a lack of love that hides behind the appearance of naturalness to avoid facing up, decisively, out of love, to the consequences that fidelity to Christ involves. Our relationship with God can be built on only one model, Christ, and we should see clearly that Jesus’ relationship with his Father shines out by its total unity: “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30).

Unity of life

Holy Mass, by its very nature, and still more when we struggle to make it the center of our interior life, possesses the power to unify human existence. In the unbloody renewal of his sacrifice on Calvary, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament takes to himself all the labors and intentions of those who are united to his oblation. He summarizes them in the adoration he offers the Father, and in the thanksgiving, reparation and petition that he makes to him.

Just as Christ in his life on earth summarized in himself all human history since Adam, and in his sacrifice summarized his own life, so also in the Sacrifice of the Mass he brings together everything that God grants mankind and synthesizes all that mankind can raise to the Father in Christ
under the impulse of the Paraclete. In short, “the Holy Eucharist … sums up and effects the mercies of God toward men.”

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass summarizes what our conduct should be—loving adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition, that is, dedication to God and through him to others. Whatever weighs on us and overwhelms us, all that fills us with joy and enthuses us, and every aspect of our daily activities, should flow into the Mass. We should go there with our personal concerns and those of others, indeed, of the whole world.

Last Christmas I told some brothers of yours that they should go to Bethlehem not only with their own intentions and needs, but should also bring Baby Jesus all the sufferings and urgent needs of everyone in the Work, the Church and the whole world. That is my advice to all of you now. When you go to Mass, bring before our Lord everyone’s material and spiritual needs, just as Christ, lifted up the Cross, was weighed down by the sins of the men and women of all times. Let us be up there with him, like him, on the Cross, where he interceded before his Father, as he does now on the altars and from the tabernacles on earth, to obtain for each human being, with divine superabundance, the graces that each needs, without excluding anyone.

You will recall that in 1966 St. Josemaría had a powerful experience that he related as follows: “After so many years, that priest made a marvelous discovery: he came to understand that the Holy Mass is real work: operatio Dei, God’s work. That day, when he celebrated Mass, he experienced pain, joy and tiredness. He felt in his flesh the exhaustion of a divine task.

“For Christ too it cost a great effort to carry out the first Mass: the Cross.”

He took this as God’s way of rewarding the efforts he had made over the years to center his whole life on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and, at the same time, as confirmation of the supernatural validity of this way to unity of life, which is so characteristic of the spirit of the Work. Let us struggle day after day so that, whatever we do, our mind is centered on Jesus Christ, to hold fast to his plans and also to enter into his sweetness.

_Pie pellicane, Iesu Domine, me immundum munda tuo sanguine_


**Becoming more and more purified**

The myth that the pelican used to pierce its breast with its beak in order to nourish its offspring on its own blood, has traditionally been used as a Eucharistic symbol that tries to represent the way the two aspects of the Eucharist, sacrifice and banquet, cannot be separated. Indeed, in holy Mass, “the work of our redemption is carried out,” and we are given the Body of Christ to eat and his Blood to drink.

In this Sacrament it is clear that Christ’s Blood redeems us, and also nourishes us and delights us. His Blood washes away all sins (cf. Mt 26:28) and restores the soul’s purity (cf. Rev 7:14). His Blood begets women and men with chaste bodies and clean hearts (cf. Zech 9:17). It is Blood that inebriates and intoxicates us with the Holy Spirit, and loosens our tongues to sing and tell the *magnalia Dei* (Acts 2:11), the mighty works of God.

As it is the very same Sacrifice of Calvary, the Eucharist contains in itself the power to wash away all sin and to grant grace. From the Mass, as from Calvary, the other sacraments are born, and they in turn direct us to Christ’s holocaust as their end. However, the ordinary sacrament (and you should repeat this in your apostolate) ordained by God to forgive mortal sins is not the Mass but Penance, the sacrament of reconciliation with God and with the Church through the absolution that follows a fully sincere and contrite confession to the priest of all the mortal sins that have not yet been forgiven directly in this sacrament.

**Receiving holy Communion properly prepared**

Moreover, precisely because the Eucharist is an expression and communication of love, it requires, in those who wish to receive our Lord’s Body and Blood, a clear desire for union with Jesus through grace. “Have you ever thought how you would prepare yourself to receive Our Lord if you could go to Communion only once in your life?

“We must be thankful to God that he makes it so easy for us to come to him: but we should show our gratitude by preparing ourselves to receive him very well.”

The quality and care of our preparation will depend, as I said earlier, on our own inner depth and sensitivity, and particularly on our faith in and
love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. “We should receive Our Lord in the Eucharist as we would prepare to receive the great ones of the earth, or even better: with decorations, with lights, with new clothes...

And if you ask me what sort of cleanliness I mean, what decorations and what lights you should bring, I will answer you: cleanliness in each one of your senses, decoration in each of your faculties, light in all your soul.”[99]

Naturally we shouldn’t wait until we are perfect (otherwise we would wait for ever) to receive our Lord sacramentally. Nor should we stop going to Mass because we don’t feel like it or because we are sometimes distracted. “Go to Communion. It doesn’t show lack of respect. Go this very day when you have just got over that ‘spot of trouble.’

“Have you forgotten that Jesus said: ‘It is not by those who are well, but by those who are sick, that the physician is needed?’”[100]

Nor should we stop receiving Holy Communion because it seems to us that the frequent reception of this Sacrament is failing to produce in us the effects we would expect from God’s generosity. “Going to Communion every day for so many years! Anybody else would be a saint by now,’ you told me, ‘and I... I’m always the same!’

“Son,’ I replied, ‘keep up your daily Communion, and think: what would I be if I had not gone?’”[101]

Rather, Christians should remember that frequent reception of Holy Communion, which was already a practice in the early Church, is an authentic sign of being in love, which our own failings cannot obliterate. “Apostolic soul: Jesus’ intimacy with you—so close to him for so many years!—doesn’t it mean anything to you?”[102]

When these or similar false excuses arise, it is more than ever time to adopt, with gratitude and trust in Jesus, the same attitude as the centurion, as we do when we say at Mass “Domine, non sum dignus, Lord, I am not worthy”. We should never forget that in the presence of the majesty and perfection of Christ, who is God and Man, we are poor beggars who have nothing. We are stained with the leprosy of pride. We do not always see God’s hand in what happens to us, and sometimes we are paralyzed and fail
to do his will. Yet all this is no justification for holding back. It should lead
us to say very often, following our Father’s example: “I wish, Lord, to
receive you with the purity, humility and devotion…”

*Cuius una stilla salvum facere totum mundum quit ab omni scelere*

*Telling others about the effects of the Eucharist*

These words refer to the characteristic “superabundance” that the
Eucharist provides, and the “excess” of divine love that has been granted
and that is continually being offered to us. This verse of the Eucharistic
hymn refers to the atoning aspect of the Sacrament. One single drop of the
God-Man’s Blood would have sufficed to erase all the sins of mankind. He
wanted, however, to shed it all. “One of the soldiers pierced his side with a
spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (Jn 19:34). In ancient
civilizations, and to some extent today too, blood symbolized life. Christ
chose to hold back none of his blood, showing his deliberate desire to give
us his whole life.

Contemplating Jesus’ total self-giving for us, and considering once
more that “there is no way to separate Christ, the God man, from his role
as redeemer,”[103] helps us to realize that we cannot be satisfied with
behaving personally as Eucharistic souls: we must spur others on to do
likewise.

It is not enough for each of us to seek our Lord in the Eucharist and
make friends with him. We need, through our apostolate, to “infect” many
others, the more the better, so that they also seek and maintain that
Try to get many others to love him. Only by having this concern in your
souls will you be able to teach it to others, because you will give what you
are living, what you have, what you are.”[104]

Seeing the sad state of ignorance that exists, even among many
Catholics, let us think, my daughters and sons, about how important it is to
explain to people what the Mass is and what it is worth, the dispositions we
should have on receiving our Lord in holy Communion, the need we feel to
go and visit him in the tabernacle, and the value and meaning of the “good
manners of piety.”[105]
Here we see an inexhaustible and fruitful field for our personal apostolate that will bring in its train, as a blessing from our Lord, a lot of vocations. That is what our beloved Father told us from the beginning, and showed us with his daily example. “In order to fulfill the will of Christ our King” (our Father was speaking here of the Work spreading throughout the world), “you need to have a lot of interior life and to be Eucharistic souls—lunettes!—souls of prayer. That is the only way you can have the dynamism the Work requires of you.”[106]

*Love for mortification and penance*

If we are to really become Eucharistic souls and prayerful souls, we need to be united habitually to the Cross, seeking and accepting mortification. Don Alvaro wrote to us about a question our Father once put to a group of his sons: “What can we do to be apostles as our Lord wants in Opus Dei?” He immediately replied energetically and with absolute conviction: “Bear within ourselves Christ crucified! (...) Our Lord listens to the petitions of mortified and penitent souls.”[107] Don Alvaro concluded from this, for himself and for everyone: “If we are to be faithful to the great commitment of co-redeeming, we must personally identify ourselves with our Lord Jesus Christ by crucifying our passions and concupiscence of soul and body (cf. Gal 5:24). This is the divine ‘paradox’ that has to be renewed in each one of us: ‘to live, we must die’ (The Way, 187).”[108]

It is precisely in the Sacrament of the Sacrifice of the Son of God that we obtain the grace and strength to become identified with Christ on the Cross. We must never doubt it: the source and root of our life of mortification are to be found in Eucharistic devotion. We will be in a position to say that we are authentic Eucharistic souls only if we live cum gaudio et pace, with joy and peace, nailed with Christ to the Cross, and if we learn to “subject and humble ourselves out of love”, if “our thoughts, affections, senses and faculties, our words and our deeds”—everything—are “tied tightly, through love for our Lady, to her Son’s Cross.” [109] A Eucharistic soul is necessarily always a priestly soul, especially if the person is consumed with desires to expiate and to sacrifice. Such a soul is “essentially, totally Eucharistic.”[110]
When we are serious about the Mass becoming “our Mass, Jesus,” because Jesus celebrates it with each of us and because we each offer ourselves as an oblation united to Christ’s offering to God the Father, then it lasts for the twenty-four hours of the day. “Love our Lord a lot. Desire to make reparation with greater contrition. We have to make reparation first for ourselves, as the priest does before he goes up to the altar. With our priestly soul, we turn our day into a Mass, in union with Christ the priest, and present to the Father a holy oblation in expiation for our own faults and the faults of all men and women... Treat our Lord well for me in the Mass and throughout the day.”[111]

Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio, oro, fiat illud quod tam sitio, ut te revelata cernens facie, visu sim beatus tuae gloriae

_Hunger to see Christ’s face_

This concluding verse of the Adoro te devote could be summarized as: “Lord, I want to see you!” This is a very natural conclusion, since the Eucharist, a “pledge of future glory,” [112] gives us a foretaste of eternal life. “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.”[113]

This central treasure of the Church is a foretaste of eternity because it makes us participants in “the Lamb’s supper” where the blessed are filled with the sight of God and his Anointed (cf. Rev 19:6-10). By the grace of God we are granted access to the same reality here and now, but not fully, only imperfectly (cf. 1 Cor 13:10-12). The new life conferred at Baptism and destined to achieve fulfillment in glory is increased and strengthened in us by the gift of the Sacrament.

Receiving Jesus in Holy Communion makes us serene in the face of death and the uncertainty of judgment, because he has assured us that “he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him upon the last day” (Jn 6:54). “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.”[114] Eucharistic faith and hope rescue us from many fears.

The holy Eucharist is “the most sacred and transcendent act that man, with the grace of God, can carry out in this life. To communicate with the Body and Blood of our Lord is, in a certain sense, like loosening the bonds of earth and time, in order to be already with God in heaven, where Christ himself will wipe the tears from our eyes and where there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor cries of distress, because the old world will have passed away (cf. Rev 21:4).”[115]

This Sacrament stands, as it were, on the threshold between this life and the next, not only when it is administered to the dying as Viaticum, but more properly because it contains Christus passus, now in glory, such that it participates in the sacramental order of this life, yet belongs substantially to heaven. This is another reason why Eucharistic piety make us more and more Opus Dei, spurring us on to be contemplatives in the world, as we journey in love on earth and in heaven: “Not ‘between’ heaven and earth, because we are of the world. In the world and in Paradise at the same time! That could be the formula to express how we should go about our life for as long as we remain in hoc saeculo, in this world.”[116]

Pledge of eternal life

God’s plan for salvation begins in this earthly stage which is “penultimate” and finishes in that which is to come, eternity. [117] Therefore faith involves a sort of initial face-to-face knowledge, a beginning of the glorious beatific vision. In the Eucharist, the tension towards glory is based above all on the love that arises from a constant relationship with Christ. A Eucharistic soul longs to adore openly the One it now adores hidden in the Bread. Loving Christ hidden in the Blessed Sacrament gives rise to an unstoppable desire to possess that love openly. “Get to know the Sacred Humanity of Jesus... And He will place in your soul an insatiable hunger, an ‘uncontrollable’ yearning to contemplate his Face.”[118]

The saints have always felt this impatience, as St. Josemaría felt it in his heart. “People in love yearn to see each other. Lovers only have eyes for their beloved. Isn’t it only natural? The human heart feels a sort of inner compulsion. I would be lying if I said I wasn’t deeply affected by the
thought of contemplating Christ’s face. *Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram;* Lord, I long to see your face. I love to close my eyes and think that, when God wills, the moment will come when I will be able to see him, not as in a mirror dimly, but … face to face (1 Cor 13:12). Yes, my children, My heart yearns for God, the living God. When shall I go and behold the face of God? (Ps 41:3).”[119]

Eucharistic devotion will give us that yearning and increase it in us until being with Christ becomes the only thing that matters, without, however, separating us from this world. On the contrary, we will love it more passionately when our heart is closely united to the Heart of Christ. Intimate friendship with our Lord in the Eucharist will vigorously impress on us the conviction that happiness is not to be found in earthly things that will grow old and disappear. Happiness is to be found in remaining always with him, whom we already possess as our “infinite treasure, pearl of great price” in this Sacrament.[120] “As he was giving out Holy Communion that priest felt like shouting out: this is Happiness I am giving to you!”[121]

*The Blessed Virgin Mary, Woman of the Eucharist*

John Paul II has called Mary the “woman of the Eucharist” and has given her to us as an example, as “school” and “guide,” so that we will learn to be amazed, which means to accept, adore and be grateful for the mystery of the Eucharist.[122]

We understand this very well in the light of faith. This was what happened to our Father, who explained to us how at holy Mass “in some way the Blessed Virgin is there, because of her intimate relationship with the most Blessed Trinity and because she is the Mother of Christ, of his flesh and blood—the Mother of Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man. Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary most holy, not through the intervention of man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. In his veins runs the blood of his Mother, the blood that is offered in the sacrifice of the redemption, on Calvary and in the Mass.”[123]

At the foot of the Cross, Mary united her own interior sacrifice—“See if there is any sorrow like my sorrow” (Lam 1:12)—to her Son’s, cooperating in the Redemption on Calvary. She “is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the
Eucharist”[124] and cooperates with the Son in spreading throughout the world—she is the Mediatrix of all graces!—the infinite saving power of the holy Sacrifice that Jesus alone accomplishes.

My daughters and sons, if in some way we have compared ourselves to Dismas, the good thief, and the Apostle Thomas, how can we fail to look at Mary, to learn to know Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to love him more, to learn from him and to imitate him, to “treat him well”? In this very personal endeavor, that incessantly will renew us interiorly and fill us with desires for sanctity and apostolate, let us find help by contemplating the mysteries of the rosary, from the Annunciation, when we see our Lady welcoming the Word Incarnate unconditionally into her most pure womb, to her glorious coronation, when God receives her body and soul into glory and crowns her as our Queen, Mother and Lady.

“We go to Jesus—and we ‘return’ to him—through Mary.” [125] Let us ask our Mother to take us by the hand always, and especially in this Year of the Eucharist, so that we may always repeat to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, with words and deeds: “I adore you, I love you”! Adoro te devote! When we do so, may we hear our beloved Father saying to us: “Call upon Mary and Joseph, because in some way they will be present in the tabernacle as they were at Bethlehem and at Nazareth (...). Don’t forget!”[126]

A very affectionate blessing from

your Father

+ Javier


[23] *Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem, / lauda ducem et pastorem / in hymnis et canticis. / Quantum potes, tantum aude: / quia maior omni laude, / nec laudare sufficies* (Roman Missal, Solemnity of Corpus Christi, Sequence *Lauda Sion*). “Sion, lift thy voice and sing: / Praise thy Savior and thy King; / Praise with hymns thy Shepherd true! / Dare thy most to praise Him well; / For He doth all praise excel; / None can ever reach His due.”


[29] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 156.


[31] Roman Missal, Solemnity of Corpus Christi, Sequence *Lauda Sion*.


[34] Council of Trent, Session 13: *Decree on the Holy Eucharist*, Ch. 4 (Denz. 1642).


[38] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 84.


Council of Trent, Session 22: *Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, Ch. 2 (Denz. 1743).


Council of Trent, Session 13, *Decree on the Holy Eucharist*, Ch. 7 (Denz. 1647).


*Ibid.*: “No example of any virtue is missing from the Cross”.


St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 9 April 1937.


St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 154.

St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 129.


*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1364.

St. Josemaría, notes taken from a get-together, 22 May 1970.


St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 14 April 1960.

St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 86-87.


Cf. *Christ is Passing By*, 88-91.


Roman Missal, Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Sequence, *Lauda Sion*.


St Leo the Great, *Homily 12 on the Passion*, 7 (PL 54, 357).

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1396.

Council of Ephesus, 431 AD (Denz. 262).


St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 19 March 1975.

St. Josemaría, *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, 123.


[106] St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, 1 April 1934, 3. The Spanish word for “lunettes” is *viriles*, which means both the lunette (the part of the monstrance that holds the sacred Host), and “manly”.


My dear families:

This year, I once again have to thank God for the gift of being able to celebrate this Fifteenth Marian Family Conference with all of you who have come to this shrine of our Lady of Torreciudad from so many parts of Spain and neighboring countries.

We are here—in our Lady’s house and surrounded by the beloved memory of St. Josemaría Escrivá—as witnesses to the Gospel of the family and of life.

We are here by the grace of the Holy Spirit to glorify God the Father through Christ, who renews his redeeming sacrifice in the Holy Mass. He, the Lord of heaven and earth, acts unceasingly in human history through the Church, of which we form part. In the responsorial Psalm we have praised God, in the words of Mary, for the great things he has done for
mankind (cf. Lk 1:50-53). The greatest of all, of course, is the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who makes himself truly present in the Eucharist, the sacrament of his Body and Blood, which he gives us as the bread of life and the drink of salvation so that we might form in Christ a single body and a single spirit; that is to say, so that in the middle of the world we might become holy and an effective leaven of holiness.

We are gathered today in Torreciudad to renew in ourselves these truths of faith, and to proclaim that marriage is also a great sacrament (Eph 5:32), an efficacious sign of God’s presence in the world and a manifestation of the indefectible love with which Christ loves his Church and makes her fruitful. We have come to reaffirm, with Pope John Paul II, that “in the Christian vision of marriage, the relationship between a man and a woman—a reciprocal relationship that is total, unique and indivisible—responds to the original design of God”; a design often “confused in history by man’s ‘hardness of heart,’ but which Christ came to restore to its original splendor, revealing what God wanted ‘from the beginning’” for the good of mankind.\(^1\)

Yes, my sisters and brothers, my daughters and sons, we are celebrating this Fifteenth Marian Conference as an unequivocal expression of our commitment to “set forth with fidelity the truth about marriage and the family,”\(^2\) as we have received it from God. Through his Vicar on earth, our Lord calls upon us to give life to society with the perennial teachings of the Church, for “there are many cultural, social and political factors that are contributing to a crisis that is ever more evident in the family,” and that at times can lead to undermining “the very concept of the family.”\(^3\)

We are not here to lament this situation. But, as John Paul II\(^4\) and the bishops of Spain\(^5\) have expressly pointed out, the signs of this obscuring of human dignity and of the holiness of marriage in the consciences of so many of our fellow citizens are clearly visible.

Faced with this scenario affecting millions of people in Spain and throughout the world, the theme chosen for this year’s Conference is especially meaningful: The Christian family, hope for the world.

Dear families, have the joyful certainty of this reality: you are the hope of the Church and of the world. God is counting on our fidelity, joined to
that of so many other persons, in order to illumine this world of ours. He is relying on you, in the words of St. Josemaría, “to drown evil in an abundance of good” and to bring to the world once more the saving message of the Gospel.

We Christians don’t consider ourselves better or more virtuous than others. But today, as always, we are called by God’s grace to be the salt and light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-14), the leaven of society (cf. Mt 13:33), and thus to revitalize culture and society with Christ’s love and truth. Our Lord urges us day by day to be an example to many who are wavering, to show them the beauty and attractiveness of our faith, the divine meaning of human love, and therefore of faithful and indissoluble marriage, the greatness of the vocation to marriage as a path to holiness, the joy of motherhood and fatherhood as a sharing in the paternity and maternity of God, through which he enriches the human family and makes it grow. And when God does not send children to a couple who truly desire them, this is another way of blessing them, so they can be open in a special way to a broader, spiritual paternity and maternity.

This is not, I’ve just said, a moment for lamentation, but rather for the joyful affirmation of our faith, for a constant apostolic dedication, filled with optimism. “Rejoice O daughter of Zion, for I am coming to dwell within you” (Zech 2:14), we heard in the first reading. This prophecy of Zechariah, which announced the salvation of the human race, was fulfilled in a small house in Nazareth, a home illumined by Jesus and by the holy and ordinary life of Mary and Joseph. And he made that home, his home on earth, a model for all families of all times. A model of faithful, chaste and fruitful love, with a spiritual fruitfulness that extends to all generations. Rejoice O daughter of Zion, for I am coming to dwell within you, our Lord repeats today, reminding us that he wants to dwell also in us and in all homes, in order to extend his mercy to the faithful from generation to generation (Lk 1:50).

Therefore I ask you, with Pope John Paul II, not to close the doors of your life and your home to Christ. Open them wide! Let the Light that dissipates all darkness enter into your souls and your homes. If we struggle, the light of faith and Love will enable us to give coherent witness to the truth about marriage and the family: about its unity and
indissolubility; about the authentic love of spouses, open always to life: don’t fear the arrival of more children; about fidelity in the midst of sorrows and joys; about generosity and refinement in mutual dealings; about self-forgetfulness and dedication to one’s children and to the service of society. … Welcome into your heart the divine Light, so that all these realities that make up married and family life—almost always ordinary things and without any apparent splendor—may shine in your home with all their human and supernatural depth, making it a true “domestic church,” a channel of holiness and apostolate.

St. Josemaría will help you to make these perennial teachings on the family a reality in your own lives. His preaching is filled with examples overflowing with Christian sense and common sense, valid for all times. I can’t resist passing on to you one of his spontaneous reflections: “To those of you who are married, my best wishes. But I tell you: Don’t let your love wither; strive to be always young, keeping yourselves entirely for each other. You should come to love one another so much that you love even your spouse’s defects, so long as they do not offend God.”[8]

And on another occasion, he advised a father: “Love your wife very much, with all your soul. Strive to educate your children well; strive to work for them, seeking to please God and to help your country. If you do so, you will be worthy of being called a loyal man and a Christian. There is no contradiction between these two duties, because they are fused together, like the strands of cord that, twisted together, form a strong rope.”[9]

And why is this granted me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Lk 1:43). Yes, my dear brothers and sisters and my children, we too, like St. Elizabeth, should marvel that our Mother brings us her Son. For in spite of our weaknesses, errors and sins, he has come into the world to save us, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons, and thus you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir (Gal 4:5-7).

Our inheritance is Christ himself and the kingdom of holiness and grace that he established by his coming into the world. By having recourse to the founts of that grace—especially the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance, together with prayer—and striving to acquire the formation
needed to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you (1 Pet 3:15), each of your homes will be a radiating hearth of charity, truth and peace in the middle of the world; a cradle of children of God; a sowing of vocations in the footsteps of Christ and for the service of the Church in apostolic celibacy; and the source of new Christian families who will transmit life and faith to future generations.

If you always stay close to our Lord, he will make you “shamelessly apostolic,”[10] filled with understanding and effectiveness, in order to undertake the immense task of the new evangelization of families that the Church has to carry out. One by one, family by family, you will reach thousands of persons and homes, showing them the human and supernatural greatness of the vocation to marriage.

Let us pray and get others to pray for these essential truths about human love, marriage and the family. At the same time, each of us should consider how we can positively influence our surroundings through a far-reaching personal apostolate of friendship and confidence. (This is another way of praying!) We will spread positive, clear ideas about doctrine, always calmly, with respect for those who think differently, because firmness is not incompatible with charity.

The desire to defend marriage and the family leads also to love for one’s country, which we love as good citizens. This right and duty is not limited to the strictly religious or spiritual terrain because, as you know, the family, a community of life and of love,[11] is the fundamental and essential cell of society. By protecting it you provide a great benefit to your homeland, and you help those who govern to take into account the legitimate desires of their citizens, whom they should never ignore, and whom they have to serve honestly, in the sincere search for the common good that makes authority legitimate.

Let us end by invoking once more our Lady of Torreciudad. Sub tuum praesidium confugimus “We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities.” Take us by the hand, O Mary; intercede before God for our families and for all the world’s families. Make us faithful apostles of your Son so as to carry out, closely united to the Pope
and all the pastors of the Church, the evangelization of society. And bring us in the end to Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb. Amen


[3] Ibid.


Torna ai contenuti

At the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature, Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (Sept. 5, 2004)

My dear ordinands:

My dear priests taking part in this ceremony,

Dear relatives and friends of
the ordinands,

Sisters and brothers:

When the first three priests of Opus Dei were ordained, St. Josemaría felt an immense joy and unbounded gratitude to our Lord, combined with a somewhat bittersweet sensation. He saw the marvelous reality of the life of the lay faithful of the Work in the middle of the world, with their invaluable task of bringing Christ into the midst of temporal occupations. Precisely for this reason, he saw from the beginning how much priests were needed. With a great zeal for souls he said: “There is a hunger, a thirst, an absolute necessity for priests!” He raised his heart to God, realizing that the ordination of those sons of his, who were leaving behind their professional work, their way of being a leaven among their fellow men, was something very pleasing to God, that is, something very much desired by the Blessed Trinity.

In a few moments, my sons, you are going to receive priestly ordination, and our holy Founder, from heaven, immersed in the enjoyment of God and freed from the sufferings of this world, will rejoice on seeing that two faithful of Opus Dei are today increasing the number of priests in the Church who are struggling to faithfully serve our Lord and his souls.

In the gospel that we just read, St. John speaks to us of the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd par excellence, who cares for his flock and gathers his sheep into one great sheepfold. With infinite and self-sacrificing love, he seeks his lost sheep. Through his passion and cross, he gave his life for the salvation of all souls, for the sanctity of each man and woman.

John Paul II, in one of his letters to priests, says: “Let them remember that their priestly ministry is—in a special way—‘ordered’ to the great solicitude of the Good Shepherd—solicitude for the salvation of every human being.... The solicitude of every good shepherd is that all people ‘may have life and have it to the full,’ so that none of them may be lost, but should have eternal life. Let us endeavor to make this solicitude penetrate deeply into our souls; let us strive to live it.”[1]

My children, today I set forth these considerations so that all of us may
engrave them in our hearts and make them a reality in our lives. Following the example of the Good Shepherd, we have to cultivate each day this solicitude for all our brethren, so that none may be lost, and so that we reach the point of giving our lives for the flock entrusted to us. Sacrifice yourself, pray and work always for souls, in the service of the Church. Remember very often those words that St. Josemaría addressed to the priests of the Work: “the dominant passion of priests of Opus Dei is to give doctrine, to direct souls: to preach and to hear confessions. You have to pour yourselves out in this effort, without fear of exhausting yourselves, without being concerned about the difficulties.”[2]

These ideals, which were lived heroically by this holy priest, are a new call to us priests to forget about ourselves and give ourselves generously to others.

It is clear that, in these moments of history, the Church needs not only holy priests but also many others souls who, without abandoning their place in life, dedicate themselves completely to God, working to Christianize society from within, cooperating with Christ to build up his kingdom on earth. Therefore I ask you, in the exercise of your ministerial task, to foster this Christian concern. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.[3]

Let us all beseech our Lord—and especially you, my sons who are about to be ordained—that many people, both men and women, may decide to dedicate themselves personally to the task of evangelization, and lead a life consistent with Christ’s faith.

In his recent message for the World Youth Day that will be celebrated next year in Cologne, the Pope says: “The Church needs saints. We are all called to holiness, and only saints can renew humanity.” In union with the Roman Pontiff, let us proclaim with our words, and especially with our lives, that all are invited by our Lord to lead a holy life and to help those around us be holy.

Perhaps you might think that the task facing you is too great to undertake. And truly, it is. But the greatness of the gift that you are about to receive today will shape your conduct in a special way. We have just read
those words of the prophet: “Ah, Lord God! Behold I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth. And the Lord responded to Jeremiah, To all whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you.” And we have also heard the exhortation of St. Paul: To each of us grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Within a few minutes, through priestly ordination you will receive the faculty to have Christ himself, Head of the Church, act through you. When you celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist, or when you impart the sacrament of Penance, you will be Christ, and share in the power of the Good Shepherd to pasture his sheep. “Think about this divinization of even our body,” stressed St. Josemaría: “this tongue that brings God to people; these hands that touch him, the power to work miracles, to administer grace. All of the marvelous realities of this world are worth nothing, in comparison with what God has entrusted to the priest.”

You are going to receive the great gift of the ministerial priesthood, which obliges you to always hold in great esteem the treasure you will be administering.

We all know that Pope John Paul II has announced the beginning of a year dedicated to the Eucharist, lasting from October 17 of this year, when the World Eucharistic Congress in Mexico starts, to October of the following year, when the Synod of Bishops will be held on this holy Sacrament. Let us begin striving right now to give a greater Eucharistic tone to our own life.

In his last encyclical, the Successor of Peter pointed out that the Holy Eucharist is the gift par excellence that God has granted to his Church. And he specified: “If the Eucharist is the center and summit of the Church’s life, it is likewise the center 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 principal and central raison d’etre of the sacrament of priesthood, which effectively came into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist.’” My dear sons who are about to be ordained, this is the fundamental reason for your ordination: the sacramental renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary.
Our Founder often repeated to us: “Love the Holy Mass!” And he encouraged us unceasingly to consider the great responsibility involved in celebrating the Holy Sacrifice. He reminded us of what St. John of Avila said upon hearing of the death of a priest who had just celebrated his first Mass: “What an accounting he will have to give to God!” Try never to get accustomed to the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Altar. Let us ask God that all Christians may deeply savor the value of each Mass. Celebrate Mass every day with the profound faith that you are bringing Jesus to the earth in the Sacred Host and in the Chalice of his Blood. And I ask that this be manifested also externally in your piety, in your adoration, in each of your genuflections, in the human and supernatural refinement of love that you show by your ardent and dignified liturgical manner.

As good sons of the Church, let us put into practice the recommendations of our beloved Pope John Paul II, when he urges us to “[give] the Eucharist the prominence it deserves, being careful not to diminish any of its dimensions or demands.” And he insists, “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.’”[6]

Similarly, St. Josemaría advised all priests: “No other activity should, normally, take precedence over this task of teaching people to love and venerate the Holy Eucharist.”[7] Many of you will recall that story about the life of the Founder of Opus Dei, how when for the first time he took our Lord into his hands he trembled physically out of devotion and respect. On recalling it, he experienced the same trembling again, and he asked that he never “get used to” being in contact with our Lord and touching him. Let us invoke his intercession so that all the faithful, and especially priests, may grow in veneration for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and attain more deeply the sense of adoration that consumed St. Josemaría's entire life.

I would like to express my warmest congratulations to the parents, relatives and friends of the two new priests, and to ask that you all continue praying for them through the intercession of Our Lady of Torreciudad.

I ask that you also pray for the Holy Father John Paul II, for his person, for his health and for all his intentions. In a special way, we unite ourselves today to his constant supplication for peace in the world and
harmony among peoples, as we accompany him on his visit to the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto. I also urge that you never fail to pray every day for the bishops of Spain and of the world.

This year we are celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the intervention of our Lady in the cure of St. Josemaría Escrivá, when as a child of two he was gravely ill and his mother, with her faith-filled prayer, obtained from her the grace of his cure. Let us present our prayers to our Lord through the hands of our Lady, our Mother, so that the Queen of Heaven and of the angels and of mankind may continue to cure the material and spiritual sicknesses of her daughters and sons, and so that we may always learn from her dedication to the will of God, which brought our Lord to us through the Incarnation.


[6] Ibid., no. 61.

Esteemed Rector of the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom, Father Salvador Cristau;

Dear brothers in the priesthood;

Esteemed president and members of the Noble Fraternity of Our Lady of Ransom;

Dear sisters and brothers:

I thank God for the opportunity to be here today in this holy house of our Lady, following in the footsteps of our beloved Founder and Father, St. Josemaría Escrivá, and of his first successor, our beloved Don Álvaro del Portillo.

On June 21, 1946, in this basilica of our Lady, St. Josemaría, who was seriously ill and burdened by the obstacles that seemed to be closing the door to the fulfillment of what God was asking of him, came to take refuge with filial trust at the feet of his Mother. That same morning, about to undertake his first trip to Rome, St. Josemaría had gathered his sons in Barcelona next to the tabernacle. And facing a seemingly closed horizon, he directed himself filially to our Lord with the words of St. Peter that we have just heard: “We have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?” (Mt 19:27) “Is it possible that the Holy See is saying we have come a century too soon?” At the same time, he entrusted himself repeatedly to our Lady, under the title of our Lady of Ransom. Shortly afterwards, he came to this basilica to entrust all his cares to her.

This is a good lesson for us: to learn to entrust all our endeavors and concerns completely to our Lady, above all when they refer to the service of God, to fidelity to each one’s specific Christian vocation. Here St. Josemaría abandoned himself totally to Mary. We want to do likewise: we want to abandon into your hands, O Mother, all our intentions, which surely cannot compare with the burden of those that then weighed on St. Josemaría’s soul. A Catholic is a child of Mary, and a child who knows himself to be small and in need of his Mother’s nearness.

When we entrust ourselves to Mary and, with her help, decide to follow God’s will no matter what the cost, our Lady will not disappoint us. You know that a few months later, in September, 1946, St. Josemaría was
already returning to Spain with documents testifying that the horizons that before had seemed completely closed had now opened up. In the history of Opus Dei, in the history of the Church, we have so many examples of Mary’s unfailing protection. Mary always hears us. Therefore, it is only right that here, in her house, we should thank her today with all our heart for her quick response to St. Josemaría’s petition.

But there is another lesson to learn. On that same day, June 21, when he had finished entrusting his intentions to Mary, he asked that, in thanksgiving, an image of our Lady of Ransom be placed in the oratory of the first center of Opus Dei in Barcelona. That was the caliber of St. Josemaría’s heart! On the following October 21 he made another trip to Barcelona solely to thank our Mother in this Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom.

I am a witness to how his gratitude to our Lady of Ransom continued to be expressed throughout his whole life: in Barcelona, whenever he visited this city of which to his great joy he was named an adopted son; and in Rome, and all over the world. My Mother, we are very grateful to you and want to make our whole life a constant act of thanksgiving for all the gifts from God that you have obtained for us, that even now you are obtaining to us, and that in future you will obtain for us.

Mother: with St. Josemaría we look towards the future of the Church and of our own lives, and we renew our resolution to place ourselves entirely in your hands, together with the decision to fully second your will. We have full trust, complete security, unshaken hope in your protection and assistance in bringing the message of Jesus into the lives of those around us, and we renew our firm resolution to be deeply grateful, ever more grateful, children.

I feel sure that the accidental glory of St. Josemaría has increased in heaven today, and that he is very happy to be spiritually more present in the house of his beloved Lady of Ransom. Not because his image appears in this relief, since we know very well that he always wanted to hide and disappear, but because it is a new testimony to his ardent love for our Lady, and it will be another encouragement for many souls to follow this sure
path of sanctity, of fidelity to God and to his Church: namely, love for and devotion to the Mother of God and our Mother.

This sculpture also contains the expiatory church of the Holy Family and other motifs connected with the city of Barcelona, entrusted to the protection of its Patroness. We are certain that the figure of St. Josemaría praying before Mary Most Holy includes all of the spiritual and material needs of the city and of the Archdiocese, as well as the intentions of its shepherd and archbishop.

The entire Prelature of Opus Dei shares in these sentiments of our holy Founder, since its whole purpose is to serve the Church present in all the local Churches.

I unite myself to the intentions and petitions of all those present and of Archbishop Lluis Martinez Sistach, who is just beginning in his life as Shepherd a new and exciting stage of service to the Church in this Archdiocese of Barcelona. I also want to ask our Lady of Ransom, with the same sentiments that were St. Josemaría's when he came here for the first time, that she continue protecting her children and listen to our petitions with the same mercy that she showed on that occasion so long ago now, and always.

Torna ai contenuti

At the novena of the Immaculate Conception, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (Dec. 5, 2004)

At the novena of the
Immaculate Conception,
Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome

My dear brothers and sisters.

1. We are preparing for the great solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady. We are also in the heart of Advent, the liturgical
season leading up to Christmas. These two feasts are a source of joy for all Catholic faithful. As the prophet Isaiah says in today’s liturgy: “People of Sion, the Lord will come to save all nations, and your hearts will exult to hear his majestic voice.”[1]

This announcement is intimately linked to God’s coming into the world, through Christ’s incarnation and birth. Jesus indeed is the Savior, God with us, who has taken on our humanity to make us sharers in his divinity. This marvelous interchange was accomplished thanks to that “yes,” the fiat of our Lady when the happy news was announced to her. Her response, prolonged throughout her whole life, has opened up for each of us the gates of divine mercy. Precisely because she had been chosen as the Mother of God, Mary was preserved from all sin—both original sin and personal sin—and was filled with all grace and virtue by decree of almighty God. She is the Immaculate One.

Our Lord came to save all nations and has filled our hearts with joy. Inspired by God, the prophet presents a paradise-like scene: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.”[2] In this scene, opposites are deliberately placed together in total harmony, the wolf and the lamb, the calf and the lion, to emphasize the effects, even upon the created world, of the coming of the Son of God to earth.

Unfortunately, if we look at the world that surrounds us, the present situation often seems to contradict these promises. From all sides there arise cries of violence; we see entire nations afflicted by hunger, sickness, war. How is it possible that all this should happen, after Christ has come to us two thousand years ago, to cure our evils? What is wrong with this world of ours? The answer is clear: all this disorder, the effect of sin, comes from man’s bad or incorrect use of freedom.

The kingdom of Christ will not be inaugurated in a clear and definitive way until the Redeemer comes gloriously at the end of time. While awaiting that moment, it is the responsibility of Christians to make him present in the specific historical period in which it has been granted them to live. “The kingdom of God is in the midst of you,”[3] Jesus said. The
kingdom of God is in our midst through grace. It is a kingdom of justice, love and peace, which it is up to us to spread throughout the whole world. “Jesus wants to see us dedicated, faithful, responsive...It is his desire that we be holy, very much his own.”[4]

2. Some years ago, the founder of Opus Dei wrote: “These world crises are crises of saints. —God wants a handful of men ‘of his own’ in every human activity. —And then... ‘pax Christi in regno Christi’—the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ.”[5] A crisis of saints: this is the real misfortune of our era and of so many other periods of history. Understand me well: it is not that now there are no saints, but sanctity does not make any noise. It is sin that is more evident, though lacking in all effectiveness and the bearer of so many other evils. Many people who see the world through the eyes of the media are drawn to those who live for material goods and with their backs turned to God, while they show little interest in those who are striving for sanctity. We have to help them to awaken from the sleep in which they are immersed. “Our Lord has entrusted us with the mission of attracting other souls to sanctity, encouraging them to get close to him, to feel united to the Church, to extend the kingdom of God to all hearts.”[6] But we have to begin with ourselves. So often we ourselves doze off and forget, at least in practice, that our definitive goal is eternal life with God.

We should not think, however, that in order to be saints one has to do extraordinary things or behave in a strange way. To be saints, or, better, to strive for sanctity (because one is only a saint when one reaches heaven) means to struggle with joy and optimism every day to direct our life towards God, even in small details. This is the message that Advent has for us, as today’s liturgy recalls in the words of St. John the Baptist: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.... The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”[7]

Some, on hearing this call to repentance and conversion, might think it is directed to those who are not yet Catholics. But that is not the case: we all need to convert, as the Holy Spirit tells us in the Book of Revelation: “Let the...righteous still do right, and the holy be [still more] holy.”[8] We are converted to God each time that we reject a temptation or do a good
deed, each time that we forgive offenses or ask God to forgive our sins or faults, each time that we begin to behave once more as true Christians.

Let us read again some words of the Holy Father: “This ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few ‘uncommon heroes’ of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, in accord with the vocation of each individual...The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction.”[9]

3. In this context, our heavenly Mother is a shining example for all of us. Our Lady, precisely because she is full of grace, is the happiest person in the world and spreads around her a deep joy. No one who draws close to Mary will be disappointed: he will learn how to love, to serve, to transmit joy to others. But we mustn’t think that Mary had an easy life. Precisely because of the great mission to which she was called, God expected from her a faithful and constant response, at the level of that taught by her Son, as happens in great human adventures in which one cannot let down one’s guard. This privilege moved the Mother of Jesus to strive more eagerly each day to attain holiness. The Second Vatican Council teaches that Mary, in her earthly life, “advanced in her pilgrimage of faith” thanks to her uninterrupted union with Christ in her thoughts, affections, and intentions. Her very generous response increased little by little, at the rhythm of the graces she received from God. She was heroically faithful in great things and in small ones. Let us go to her with special confidence during these days and ask her that we too might think of nothing other than fulfilling “in everything and for everything” the will of our Lord.

We tell her: Mother of ours, you are *tota pulchra*, all beautiful, with a singular beauty whose depths no one can fathom. You are the only person in whom God has taken total delight. You were filled with perfections and you corresponded to God with all your heart. Help us to learn how to correspond to what God wants from us, to truly strive to be saints. Help us to carry out at your side an unceasing and optimistic apostolate, without human respects, wanting the best for everyone; and help us to take advantage of these conversations filled with charity to speak of our
marvelous friendship with Jesus, the friend who never betrays us and never abandons us.

It fills us with joy to think about your life here on earth. Exteriorly it was very much like our own, because we too are busy with so many everyday things: work, family, social and professional relationships. Like you, we too need to take care of domestic chores, and be concerned about the spiritual and material needs of others, especially those closest to us. And above all we need to take care of our personal relationship with God, which should always be our first concern: personal prayer, partaking of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

“This time of Advent is a time for hope. These great horizons of our Christian vocation, this unity of life built on the presence of God our Father, can and ought to be a daily reality.”[10] Teach us, O Mother, to fulfill all our duties joyfully. Let our daily life be transformed into a unity of life, into a song of praise to your Son, to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. To you we entrust the supplication that the Church places on our lips today: “God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy, so that we may share his wisdom and become one with him.”[11] We ask your help in becoming Christians who are consistent with our vocation, who are not afraid when God calls us. We ask you also for many vocations to the priesthood, provoked at times by our own words, and by our prayer and mortification and the example of our life filled with joy, because we know ourselves to be your children and children of God.

At the Mass opening the academic year of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Basilica of St. Apollinaris, Rome (Oct. 11, 2004)

At the Mass for the opening of
the academic year in the Pontifical
University of the Holy Cross,
Basilica of St. Apollinaris, Rome

Dearly beloved,

On the day of the Resurrection, our Lord breathed on the disciples gathered in the Cenacle saying to them: receive the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:23). The same Spirit who inspired St. John to recall and put into writing the Teacher’s words is the one who today moves us to penetrate more deeply into the meaning of the revelation inscribed in the light of the paschal mystery. The Holy Spirit is also the one who will guide us, if we invoke him with faith throughout this academic year, as we strive to penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of the truth. The gift that we receive from God by means of his Spirit enables us to rise from the level of natural knowledge to that of faith. The help of heaven comes to our aid in our study and work to better assimilate the revealed truths, and gives us the grace to contemplate them with the new light that Jesus himself promised to his apostles.
Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are preparing to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy, in which the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross for our salvation is made sacramentally present. In the Mass, our prayer to the Father is constant. “And the action of the Holy Spirit in the Mass is truly present, although in a mysterious manner. ‘By the power of the Holy Spirit,’ writes St John Damascene, ‘the transformation of the bread into the body of Christ takes place.’”[1]

To make the Eucharist the center and root of all of our activities means to entrust our life, and all its concerns, to God the Father through Jesus, with the desire of placing our whole day under the light and spiritual force that the Eucharistic mystery radiates. With the occasion of the Eucharistic year, this reality becomes even more present. The International Eucharistic Congress, now taking place in Guadalajara, Mexico, and the next year's Synod of Bishops on “The Eucharist, source and summit of the Church’s life and mission,” point respectively to its beginning and its conclusion. This Eucharistic Year has as its framework the pastoral plan pointed out by the Pope in Novo Millennio Ineunte, which invited all the faithful to begin again with Christ. “In a certain sense,” the Holy Father wrote in his recent Apostolic letter Mane Nobiscum Domine, “it is meant to be a year of synthesis, the high-point of a journey in progress.”[2]

Let us look at Jesus and consider his mission as the source of Christian life. We need to contemplate more deeply the Word Incarnate, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. Prayer before the tabernacle will not only enable us to penetrate every more deeply into the mysterious reality of Easter, but also to dedicate ourselves more effectively to the task of the “new evangelization.” Prayer and study enable us to fathom more fully the mystery of the gift of the Son of God to mankind, while assiduous frequenting of the Eucharist will give us the strength to apply the revealed truth to our daily life, and to transmit it as salvific news.

In the Eucharistic mystery, Christ shines forth in a special way as the “mystery of light” capable of illuminating all of our days. With Him there is no possibility of monotony in our life, for everything is illuminated by the One who is the Light of the world (cf. Jn 8:12). Certainly this is so in a different way than was the case “in the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, in which his divine glory shines forth brightly. In the
Eucharist the glory of Christ remains veiled,” observes Pope John Paul II. “The Eucharist is pre-eminently a mysterium fidei. Through the mystery of his complete hiddenness, Christ becomes a mystery of light, thanks to which believers are led into the depths of the divine life.”[3]

In accord with this new light, we should confront the new academic year with a spirit of confidence and daring, of joy and generosity. In the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá, we can say that “the holy Eucharist gives the sons of God a divine newness, and we must respond in novitate sensus, ‘in the newness of your mind’ (Rom 12:2), renewing all our feelings and actions. We have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord. We must not return to the old leaven, for now we have the bread which lasts forever.”[4]

May Mary Most Holy, whom the Holy Father called “the woman of the Eucharist,” help us grow in love and faith for the mystery of the Body and Blood of our Lord and to be apostles among all people.


[3] Ibid., no. 11.


On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Parish of St. Josemaria, Rome (December 8, 2004)

On the Solemnity of

the Immaculate Conception

at the Parish of
St. Josemaría, Rome

Dear brothers and sisters:

1. Today we are filled with a special joy because we are celebrating a feast day of the Mother of God and our Mother. We somehow sense more strongly her nearness, her protection. Our Lady is the omnipotent supplicant; God always listens to her. Let us take advantage of her intercession.

“I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God; for he has clothed me in the garment of salvation and robed me in the cloak of justice, like a bride adorned with her jewels.”[1]

The Church makes use of these words from the prophet Isaiah in the entrance antiphon today. It is not too hard to recognize in them some of the elements that our Lady collected from various parts of Sacred Scripture when reciting spontaneously—inspired by the Holy Spirit—her marvelous canticle, the Magnificat, which priests repeat every afternoon at vespers, in the prayer of the whole Church. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....”[2]

On the solemnity of Mary’s Immaculate Conception, we find this canticle especially attractive. It can help us contemplate so many “great things” that God has worked in Mary, preparing her—as the opening prayer teaches us—to be a worthy dwelling place for his Son, to whom she was to give birth. It can also help us to be more aware of the “great things” that he has carried out in the Church and in each Christian as well, because our Lord also wants to live in each one of us.

Why does Mary’s soul glorify the Lord and her spirit rejoice with exalted adoration and gratitude? Our Lady herself tells us: “Because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.”[3] Mary is overcome with surprise, and therefore with jubilation, when she realizes that she has been chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah, the mother of the Son of God made man for our salvation.

2. Humility is an essential virtue in the Christian life: so essential that, if it is lacking, there is no other virtue. Our Lord said: “Learn from me, for
I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”[4]

We frequently forget that mankind has been taught this truth by the Gospel and that twenty centuries of the Church’s history has forcefully reaffirmed its importance. But before Christ this was not the case. The ancient world did not count humility among the virtues, but rather despised it. Jesus gave it such great value because he came to teach us that only the one who knows how to serve, who know how to help others, is truly great. St. Josemaría never ceased to teach that we should make our heart into a carpet so that others can step softly upon it.

If we consider the meaning that the ancient world gave to the word “humility,” we will understand even better the surprise that overwhelmed Mary’s soul, which she forcefully expressed in the Magnificat. She, who without any shadow of hypocrisy considered herself the least of all creatures, discovered thanks to the annunciation of the angel that she had been chosen to enter history in a new and surprising way, through the incarnation of the Lord in her most pure womb.

It was Mary, therefore, as a sign announcing and representing Jesus, who gave a new meaning to the word “humility.” Precisely because she recognized her lowliness before God and other men and women, our Lady was filled with all graces; her humility prepared her to be able to receive God and give him to the world. Not only was Mary preserved from original sin and from all personal sins, but the divine benevolence took full possession of her from the first moment of her conception, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of all men and women. When to her immense surprise she saw that these marvels had been worked in her, Mary’s soul broke forth in a song of praise to God with irrepressible rejoicing.

We all want to join our Mother in blessing God because it was his will that a daughter of Adam and Eve, like ourselves, be raised so high. I invite you to meditate on the words of the patron saint of your parish, Saint Josemaría Escrivá, who wrote: “How people like to be reminded of their relationship with distinguished figures in literature, in politics, in the army, in the Church! —Sing to the Immaculate Virgin, reminding her: Hail Mary, daughter of God the Father! Hail Mary, Mother of God the Son!
Hail Mary, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit! Greater than you, no one but God!"[5]

Let us learn to be more humble every day, so as not to place obstacles between ourselves and God, between ourselves and others. And let us consider how sad and ridiculous it is to be a vain and proud person, loving only oneself.

3. But the Magnificat, the canticle of humility, does not belong to Mary alone. One of the earliest Fathers of the Church, Saint Irenaeus, commenting on the scene of the Annunciation, states that “Mary, filled with joy, raises her voice prophetically in the name of the Church: My soul glorifies the Lord....”[6] That is why the Church, as we just recalled, recites this canticle every day through the voice of her priests, and why all of us should recite it with our lips and our hearts.

The Church has many reasons to rejoice, as do all of us. For, called by the Father, the Church has become the People of God on earth; she has been redeemed by the Blood of Christ, who has made her his beloved Spouse and his Mystical Body; the Holy Spirit has filled her with his gifts and is constantly raising her up as the holy temple of the Blessed Trinity.

Among so many reasons for marveling and giving thanks, I would like to recall especially one that is very timely, in this year dedicated to the Eucharist: the fact, namely, that the Church is the depository of the Sacrifice of Christ, who becomes sacramentally present on our altars; and, at the same time, she has been given the charge of preserving the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of our Redeemer. Doesn't this seem to you more than enough reason for the Church to intone each day the Magnificat and give voice to the “great things” that the Almighty has done?

Besides, let’s not forget that Christ’s remaining under the appearances of bread and wine, when the Eucharistic species are reserved in the tabernacle, constitutes our Lord’s greatest manifestation of humility, giving himself to us completely. I will read for you another passage from Saint Josemaría: “The humility of Jesus: in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, on Calvary. But more humiliation and more self-abasement still in the Sacred Host: more than in the stable, more than in Nazareth, more than on the Cross.

“That is why I must love the Mass so much.”[7]
The best way to thank Jesus for his Love, which has led him to remain with us in the Holy Eucharist, is to take part with attention and devotion in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, preparing ourselves very well to receive him in communion, giving thanks after receiving him, and visiting him frequently in the tabernacle. These are the fruits that the Pope is looking for during this Year of the Eucharist, as he said in his Apostolic letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*: “The Eucharist is a great mystery! And it is one which above all must be well celebrated. Holy Mass needs to be set at the center of the Christian life and celebrated in a dignified manner by every community, in accordance with established norms, with the participation of the assembly.”[8]

I give thanks to God because this is the case in your parish of Saint Josemaría, where Jesus is adored and accompanied with so much love. But isn't it true that we could always do more? Isn't it true that we could prepare ourselves better to receive our Lord, that we could keep him company more frequently, that we could invite others to do likewise. I recommend to you, as our Holy Father suggested, “During this year Eucharistic adoration outside Mass should become a particular commitment for individual parish... communities.”[9] I am sure that your love for Jesus and the zeal of your priests will impel you in this direction. If you act in this way, how much spiritual fruit there will be in the life of each of you, in your families, and in the entire parish community!

4. Let us turn our eyes once more to Mary. On today’s solemnity we want to direct to her our heart-felt petition.

Mother, we tell her. You are the path leading to God, after God made you the path to descend to us, taking from you our humanity. How we would like to contemplate you with the eyes of the body and the soul! But to do so, our Mother, we need to have the scales removed from our eyes that prevent us from looking at everything that happens in our life with supernatural outlook and humility. We need to be convinced that only to the extent that God fills our life—our work and our rest, our sorrows and our joys—will we be truly happy and useful to others, as you have taught us with your own life.
To attain this, Mother of God and our Mother, in addition to God’s grace, we need a sincere humility. The reason for your greatness, the fertile ground that made it possible for the great gift of your divine motherhood to germinate, was nothing other than a profound humility, your letting God act through your active cooperation. Obtain for us, O Mother, the grace of deeply grasping the meaning of this virtue. It is true that in our life, there are, thanks be to God, so many good things; but we have received all of them from our Lord. Knowing ourselves to be debtors will make us docile instruments, prompt to serve.

Teach us, Mother, that to love God we have to struggle to serve others, beginning with our families, our friends and our colleagues. And let us not forget that the best service we can offer them is to encourage them—in the first place, by our example—to drink deeply at the fountain of grace: sacramental Confession and the Eucharist. Let us beseech our Mother that many people may approach the sacraments during these days and come closer to her Son Jesus through our apostolate, carried out without fear of what others may think. Amen.

[6] Saint Irenaeus, Against the Heresies, III, 10, 2 (ScCh 211, 118).
[9] Ibid., no. 19.
At the opening of the Eucharistic Year in the Prelature, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (Oct. 30, 2004 and Nov. 1, 2004)

At the ceremony opening the Eucharistic year in the Prelature, at the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome

A two-hour service of Eucharistic adoration was held at the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace from 3:30 to 5:30 on the afternoon of October 30, 2004. This service was to solemnly mark the beginning of the Eucharistic Year proclaimed by Pope John Paul II.

Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, introduced the celebration with the following words:

As the Second Vatican Council reminded us, reiterating what the magisterium preceding it had taught: “In the most blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch and the living Bread which gives life to men through his flesh—that flesh which is given life and gives life through the Holy Spirit” (Presbyterorum Ordinis 5). During this Eucharistic time, we want to unite ourselves to the prayer of praise, adoration and thanksgiving that millions of people throughout the world, taking up the invitation of the Holy Father John Paul II, will raise to heaven in this year especially dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament.

First of all I remind you that, to become people who truly adore God, as we have just sung in the Adoro te Devote, we must strive to foster a new conversion in our lives. Let us look at our Lord. Jesus is speaking to us from the monstrance, telling us so many things simply by his real presence under the Sacred Species. We have spoken to him in our hearts and repeated many petitions with vocal prayers as well. We have said to him: Forgive us, O Lord! We now address you again, Lord Jesus, thanking you for having redeemed us on the Cross. We continue to need your forgiveness because we constantly see our own failings, small ones and
sometimes not so small. For a person who knows how to love, the hurt we sometimes cause to those we most love is always big.

We recall St. Josemaría Escrivá’s Eucharistic devotion. Close to his holy remains, we ask him to intercede so that God will give us an ever more ardent love for the Most Blessed Sacrament. Each of us needs to foster the certainty that Jesus Christ is accompanying us at every moment. Therefore, let us strive to uncover anything in our life that is distancing us from Jesus. Because He is always at our side. It is we, each of us, who provoke, by our negligence, our lacks of love, the distancing of this Lord who is Father, Teacher, Doctor, Friend.

Lord, let each of your children experience your nearness and grant them the desire to increase their friendship with you every day until they become your intimate friend. Let us live a clean life, a life of love; and to do so, we have to foster a spirit of contrition, a constant conversion.

The Christian life is neither pessimistic nor sad; on the contrary, it partakes of the happiness that comes from being identified with the Being who is infinitely happy. Therefore contrition constitutes a powerful aid for all of us, since it makes us capable of loving more, of living more in harmony with our Lord. Therefore the saints (and we all have to try to be such, although we are of so little worth) have always been great friends of contrition. I remember how often St. Josemaría used to advise us to foster a contrition that was “love-sorrow.”

Lord, I want to love you more. It is you, in your goodness, who cancels out my failings. Let us be contrite in order to love more. And let us turn with devotion, with an urgent need, to our Lady. Mary, by fully accepting the will of the Blessed Trinity, became the first tabernacle for Jesus, a living tabernacle, when she received in her most pure womb this Lord of ours, who trod our earthly roads to help us give supernatural savor and meaning to all that we do.

God does not ask us for a heroism that surpasses our strength. He offers his grace and expects of us a heroic response that is within our reach. As St. Josemaría taught us, for a Christian who should sanctify himself in the midst of everyday life, his heroism is that of fidelity to God in the ordinary and usually small things that we meet each day, in the fulfillment
of our family, professional and social duties...in our home, in our work, in our study, in our friendships, in moments of rest. This is where we must put into practice the charity that unites us to God, and with God, to all men and women.

Let us give thanks to our Lord for the Holy Father that he has given us. Let us thank him very specifically for the marvelous idea of proclaiming a “Year of the Eucharist,” which he wants to be, as it were, the “high point” in the journey undertaken during the years that preceded and followed the Great Jubilee (cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 10). In a certain sense, after the Apostolic letters *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, this Year of the Eucharist signifies the crowning of the pastoral plan of John Paul II for the Church in the twenty-first century.

The Year of the Eucharist began a few days ago. What have we done up till now? Have we made specific resolutions? Have we decided to try to ensure that our whole day has a more decidedly Eucharistic tone to it? Let us tell our Lord with all our strength that we want to be men and women who are truly Eucharistic, who see the altar and the tabernacle as the center of their lives; men and women who want to live with Him, for Him, and around Him; men and women who, with their lives, are striving for just one goal: that Jesus be known, loved, and adored by every human being.

The task that awaits us is marvelous: entering into the most intimate circle of our Lord. Let us do all we can to make ourselves worthy, purifying our life by frequent acts of sorrow. Let us go to the sacraments with greater devotion. Let us do a deep apostolate of the Eucharist, speaking to many people of the marvelous richness of love that is the Eucharist. Let us speak without human respect about the holy sacrament of penance which gives to us, who are poor creatures, the possibility of being well prepared to receive the One who is the King of glory, the Savior of the world.

Lord, come and stay with us! We beseech you to help each of us prepare himself, every day and at every moment, to receive you as worthily as possible. Amen.

*On the afternoon of November 1, 2004, the solemnity of All Saints, a Eucharistic ceremony was held in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace for the beginning of “The Year of the Eucharist.” In the course of the celebration,*
which lasted several hours, the Prelate of Opus Dei addressed the following words to those present:

A moment ago we sang: *Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspio* (Jesus whom hidden now I see). Truly, Lord, your power is great. Even though hidden under the veil of the sacramental species, you gather around you such a multitude of people throughout the whole world. We would like to always count ourselves among this multitude, and specifically right now, in order to speak to you intimately. It is not only now that we have this opportunity, because one can speak to Jesus in any circumstance. But during this Eucharistic exposition, we are helped by the real presence of our Lord, who presides over us with his body, his blood, his soul and his divinity.

Lord, we give you thanks because you come to us and remain with us. We adore you, Lord, because you are truly the King of kings and you want to be in our midst, beside us poor creatures. We seek you, Lord, because you are truly our refuge amid trials, forgiveness for our faults. We direct ourselves to you, Lord, because if we consider our life with a bit of objectivity, we immediately realize that we have nothing ourselves, that whatever good we have comes from you.

This morning I was meditating on something written by Saint Josemaría. I read that when he placed himself before our Lord, he so often felt deep in his soul that urgent cry: *ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur*; I came to cast fire upon the earth and would that it were already kindled (*Lk* 12:49). Truly our Lord speaks to us with an intimate cry, continually waiting for us to offer him more space in our soul so that he can fill us with his goodness, with his love.

Our Lord died on the Cross and rose for our salvation. As the Holy Father writes: “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” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 11). Thus, before leaving us, he wished to institute the Holy Eucharist, so that every man and woman, right to the end of time, could be very close to the Sacrifice of Calvary, which is made present whenever the Holy Mass is celebrated. “Each member of the faithful can
thus take part in it and gain its inexhaustible fruits. This is the faith from which generations of Christians down the ages have lived” (Ibid.)

How many treasures we have in our hands! What a great responsibility! It is logical, then, that we look—without scruples or fears—at our life to see whether we are men and women who know how to be demanding on themselves, to be close to the Cross, with Mary, John and the holy women, during Holy Mass, realizing that we have can participate in the Sacrifice of Calvary with our whole soul and body.

Oh Lord, you are for everyone the Teacher who instructs us, the Friend who keeps us company, the Shepherd who guides us, the Physician who cures us: make all of us more aware of the treasure of love that you entrust to our weakness. Truly, as Saint Josemaría so often said, it makes one feel like prostrating oneself on the ground, lying on one’s face, asking God for his mercy. And like the father of the prodigal son, he will raise us up and fill us with his love.

Therefore, it’s very important that we turn to him constantly: when things are going well, because he is the one who grants us the help and strength needed to draw fruit from what we are doing; and also when we meet with the difficulties that are part and parcel of daily life, so that we learn to love the Cross and to carry it with elegance, as our Lord did for each of us.

Lord, you want people to get to know you also through our response. Thus, as Saint Josemaría taught us, we tell you that we want to be another Christ; we want to be like you. We want to be alter Christus, ipse Christus. We can all attain this, because he doesn’t refuse anyone. He takes possession of the souls of those who are faithful to him, who follow him, who accept him. Let us welcome our Lord, and strive to correspond, following him very closely.

To do so, the help of Mary is indispensable. The Holy Father has called her “the woman of the Eucharist.” For women it is a privilege that the person closest to Jesus, when everyone abandoned him, was a woman, Mary most holy. Although we are all children of our Lady and she loves us all very much, one can say that women have a very special part in that love.
If they wish, with our Lady’s intercession, they can renew this nearness to Calvary in a world that is fleeing madly from Christ.

Let us reflect on this responsibility and tell our Lord in confidence: Lord, stay with us, because we don’t want to separate ourselves from you. We will bring you souls from all over the world, because we want you to live in everyone. Thus we learn a clear lesson from the Eucharist: the need to do a lot of apostolate, both through the sacrament of penance as well as the sacrament of the Eucharist, the living Bread that gives life, that vivifies. Make us more determined apostles, so that we speak to others about God and bring God’s love to all who are awaiting us. May the Lord be with you always!

Addresses

At the opening of the academic year of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (Oct. 11, 2004)

At the opening of the academic year at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome
Esteemed authorities,
Professors, students and staff of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross,
Ladies and gentlemen:
We are gathered once more in Apollinare for the beginning of a new
academic year. Both the civil and liturgical calendars offer us each year moments that are particularly propitious for taking a calm look at our daily activity, often marked by an accelerated pace and urgency, and then returning once again to our daily rounds with greater vigor and effort. At times, a particular date is seen as a goal, a small but significant objective because of all the work that preceded it and prepared for it. Then we realize clearly that every human undertaking requires many days of work, many hours of sacrifice on the part of so many different people.

This reflection comes to mind today as we begin the twenty-first year of our university. In times past, in the life of young people this age meant reaching adulthood, perhaps even an independent life in the social and professional spheres. In contrast, for a university twenty years is a very short time, barely permitting it to take the first steps.

Nevertheless, it is right that we begin by raising our heart to God in thanksgiving for the gifts we have received during these years. I feel obliged, as well, to acknowledge here all those whose generosity and self-sacrifice have enabled the university to already have taken such significant steps. I have in mind so many who work as professors or in administrative tasks, as well as the many benefactors throughout the world who have shown their support for the service that the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross is providing to the Church. I am also thinking of the bishops and the students from all over world who have wanted to share with us the passionate adventure of teaching and research in the sacred sciences, so necessary to live up to the expectations of the new evangelization to which the Holy Father, John Paul II, has been continually calling us.

Obviously I can’t take the time to mention by name all those with whom we have this debt of gratitude, though they are certainly present every day in our prayers. It would not be just, however, to omit an explicit acknowledgement of thanks to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, the first Prelate of Opus Dei and the architect, as Grand Chancellor, of the University of the Holy Cross, seconding the hopes that St. Josemaría harbored in his heart for many years.

As you know, on March 20th of this year, there was held here in this hall the inaugural session of the tribunal of the Prelature of Opus Dei,
which will carry out, in parallel with the tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome, the first steps of the cause of canonization of the Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo. As I recalled on that occasion, this cause is not seeking any human glory for Opus Dei, but only the good of the Church and the edification of souls. Without trying to anticipate the Church's judgment, I am convinced that many people, through the life of our beloved Don Alvaro, will discover more fully the face of God, who smiles on us, encourages us and forgives us each day, if we go to him.

In particular, I would like to recall an event on November 20, 1985, when there took place, at Via San Girolamo della Carità, the inauguration of the second year of what was then known as the Roman Academic Center of the Holy Cross. On that occasion, my beloved predecessor summed up the purpose of the Academic Center with these words: “To impart to its students an integral formation that, besides a rigorous knowledge of the doctrine and laws of the Church, will include a spiritual and human formation in complete harmony with the wishes and directives of the Holy See. This formation will foster each one’s personal freedom and responsibility, striving to facilitate a disinterested and fruitful service to the Truth.”[1]

The task delineated by Don Alvaro is not something that can be accomplished once and for all. But a person who seeks to praise God through his work should see this open-ended possibility to always improve as a great good. It is a task that is always being accomplished and, at the same time, always needs to be carried out with greater sensitivity, competence and wisdom. The words of Don Alvaro that I have just read continue being as true today as they were then.

Certainly the study of the sacred sciences does not seek to be up to date in the same way as the disciplines cultivated by the experimental sciences. As St. Josemaría, the inspiration behind this university, said: “in the religious sphere man is still man and God is still God. In this sphere the peak of progress has already been reached. And that peak is Christ, alpha and omega, the beginning of all things and their end.

“In the spiritual life, there is no new era to come. Everything is already there, in Christ, who died and rose again, who lives and stays with us
always.”[2]

If we set aside for a moment the specific features that distinguish each of the sacred sciences, we can say that, taken as a whole, they help a Christian to give a meaningful response to the challenges that contemporary civilization continually presents. In this dialogue between human effort and a deepening in the riches of the Christian message, a development takes place in the understanding of revelation, presented in a language accessible to contemporary man, who is seeking in Christ’s disciples authentic witnesses and companions on the path of life. “But we have to unite ourselves to Him through faith, letting his life show forth in ours to such an extent that each Christian is not simply alter Christus: another Christ, but ipse Christus: Christ himself?”[3]

I now address myself more directly to those of you who are students, who are the principal component, although in a certain sense also the most transitory one, of the University of the Holy Cross. I exhort you to be diligent and tenacious in studying the disciplines that make up your academic curriculum. Look beyond the immediate goal of marks and grades. Learn especially to seek out, during your stay in Rome, the dimensions of Catholicity that make this city unique in the world because of its physical proximity to the Vicar of Christ. Make Christ’s charity the foundation of your intellectual work, since all that one does for Love (with a capital L) takes on eternal value.

There is taking place right now in Guadalajara, Mexico, the forty-eighth International Eucharistic Congress. We all feel very close to the Pope and to the universal Church in this year especially dedicated to the Eucharist, which is to conclude in October 2005 with the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

As the Pope stressed in his recent Apostolic Letter, the Eucharist is “the source and manifestation of communion.”[4] “It is the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, the Lord’s Day also becomes the Day of the Church, when she can effectively exercise her role as the sacrament of unity.”[5]
For this reason also, in the building where this university has its seat, the privileged site is the chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is preserved. As St. Josemaría liked to say, the tabernacle should be the “magnet” that impels us to entrust to Jesus, really and substantially present in our midst, our joys and concerns, our intentions and ever-renewed resolutions of holiness and service.

Close to the tabernacle, a soul in love also finds the delicate and ineffable presence of Mary Most Holy. In entrusting to her this new academic year, I make my own the Holy Father’s invocation on the feast of Corpus Christi this year, which fell on June 13. May our Lady, who in the Year of the Rosary helped us to contemplate Christ with her glance and her heart, also make our academic community during the Year of the Eucharist grow in faith and love for the mystery of the Body and Blood of our Lord.

With the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we have the custom of addressing as Sedes Sapientiae, and through the intercession of St. Josemaría, I declare the opening of the academic year 2004—2005.


[3] Ibid.


At the ceremony for laying the first stone of the Campus Biomedico, in Trigoria, Rome

Saint Josemaría Escriva used to say that Opus Dei was born in the hospitals of Madrid. He said that the strength to fulfill God’s will had come to him through the prayers of the sick, to whom he dedicated no small part of his time—helping them, consoling them, administering the sacraments. At the same time, with great faith and convinced of the supernatural value of suffering, he asked them to offer their suffering for an intention that would give great glory to God.

Thus you can understand my joy in taking part today in this ceremony marking the start of construction of the new University Hospital, where it will be possible to carry out, with greater means and efficiency, the work that has been carried out now for a number of years in the service of the sick in the building on Via Longoni.

I also feel that I should note with special gratitude our debt to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, my predecessor of holy memory, who encouraged the birth of this initiative with particular affection.

It has already been mentioned that this first stone of the University Hospital is also a point of departure for the definitive seat of the Campus Biomedico University, an initiative that—like all the projects that receive the spiritual assistance of the Prelature of Opus Dei—is a professional and civic entity, but at the same time one with a clear Christian identity. I am sure that everyone in this university, each in his or her own field, is making an effort to offer a loyal and effective service to society and to bringing light to the life of the men and women of our time through the effort of work well done, of serious and rigorous study, and especially of scientific research motivated by a sincere love for the truth, showing the harmony between reason and faith—always with the maximum respect for a legitimate pluralism of opinion. Such research will contribute to the building up of a more human society, one with greater solidarity, as well as to the great work of re-evangelization to which the Holy Father John Paul II has called all Christians.

Finally let me refer once again to Saint Josemaria. We learned from him to have a special love for last stones. Beginning is certainly important,
but what is essential is to finish. I ask our Lord that we might find ourselves here once more within some months, the number of months scheduled for concluding the construction work.
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMÁRÍA
Other News

During the months of August and September, 2004, the review of Christian anthropology and culture Humanitas, published by the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, organized a course entitled “Witnesses of the Twentieth Century, Teachers of the Twenty-First Century.” The seven sessions dealt with the life and work of persons who had been canonized or beatified and who, through their teaching, their participation in the life of the Church and their path in life, had become true teachers for men and women of the third millennium. The speakers, among whom were the Apostolic Nuncio, Cardinal Jorge Medina, and other bishops, emphasized the spirituality of these teachers and the example of their life of identification with Christ for people today.

Bishop Juan Ignacio Gonzalez of San Bernardo, Chile, in his talk on Saint Josemaría Escrivá, stressed three aspects of his message that, he said, are essential for these times: the universal call to holiness, love for the Church and the Pope, and love for freedom, with its consequent responsibility, in the professional, family, and social activity of the baptized.

Under the title San Josemaría Escrivá. Enamorado de Dios, apasionado por la vida (Saint Josemaría Escrivá: a man in love with God and enthusiastic about life), a company in Spain called 101rpm has put on sale a DVD containing abundant audiovisual material (three hours in length) about the founder of Opus Dei.

The DVD includes a sketch of his life and his canonization in Rome, segments from his get-togethers with hundreds of people in various countries in the ’seventies, testimonies from people who knew him, and a description of the miracles that were approved for his beatification and canonization, as described by their protagonists. The DVD also includes a sample of the various educational, social and cultural activities that people of all walks of life, animated by the teachings of Opus Dei’s founder, are carrying out throughout the world, and two series of photographs on his life and reputation for holiness. Most of this material has been provided by Beta Films.
Throughout 2004 some 30 public presentations of the DVD have been held in various Spanish cities and 40,000 copies have been distributed to date.

A small book containing passages from the writings of Saint Josemaría has been published for the use of pilgrims traveling along the “Camino de Santiago” to Santiago de Compostella. The book by Santiago Climent seeks to help pilgrims to pray as they walk along the “way of Santiago.” Its title is Hacer el Camino (Traveling Along the Way). Fifty thousand copies have been printed in Spanish and five thousand in Portuguese, French, Galician (the language of the area where the shrine is located), and English.

A ceremony marking the naming of a street in Naples in honor of Saint Josemaría Escrivá was held on October 2, in the presence of Coadjutor Bishop Gennaro Pascarella of Pozzuoli, who blessed the street, Mayor Rosa Russo Iervolino, and Msgr. Lucio Norbedo, the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Italy.

A large crowd made up mostly of families with children attended the ceremony. The street is located in the Pianura district, on the northern outskirts of Naples. An image of Saint Josemaría and another of Our Lady of Guadalupe will soon be installed at a site along the street.

The first dual language edition of Holy Rosary in Swahili and English has been published by Scepter Ltd., with a printing of 5,000 copies. In August 2004 the first edition of The Way was published in Tigrigna, a language spoken in Eritrea. 1,500 copies were printed.

The Warsaw publishing company Pax published a Polish translation of the book What is Opus Dei? by Dominique Le Tourneau under the title Czym jest Opus Dei? It contains a straightforward description of the nature of Opus Dei, with special attention to its juridical aspects.

On the occasion of the Eucharistic Year, Apostolicum publishers in Warsaw has put out a book entitled Sw. Josemaríi Escrivá o Eucharystii. The book includes two homilies of Saint Josemaría on the Eucharist: “The Eucharist: a Mystery of Faith and Love,” and “On the Feast of Corpus Christi,” with an introduction by the Prelate of Opus Dei. Special editions of these two homilies have been published in other countries as well. And
in Vienna, the Church of St. Peter (Rektoratskirche St. Peter) has put out an audio-CD with the two homilies in German, read by an actor, Michael König, of the Vienna Burgtheater.

Auxiliary Bishop Manuel Clement of Lisbon, speaking on public television in Portugal, gave a sketch of the life of the founder of Opus Dei, emphasizing the importance of his message for the discovery of Christian secularity. Saint Josemaría was featured in six programs beginning on October 21. Each of the programs consisted of a brief interview conducted by the director of Agencia Ecclesia, Paulo Rocha.

Publication of the book Vida y venturas de un borrico de noria...y su Relojerico (Life of a Donkey at the Waterwheel...)

Palabra Publishers of Madrid, as part of its illustrated books collection, has published Vida y venturas de un borrico de noria... y su Relojerico (“The Life and Adventures of a Donkey at the Waterwheel... and his Watchmaker”), based on the life of Saint Josemaría Escrivá. Both the text and illustrations are the work of Paulina Monckeberg. The title of the book comes from the founder of Opus Dei’s fondness for donkeys, in whom he saw many positive qualities (patience, perseverance, austerity, hard work….); and also from the nickname Relojerico (“Watchmaker”) that he gave to his guardian angel, whom he asked to wake him up in the morning when he didn’t have the money needed to get his alarm clock repaired.

Full-color illustrations help to evoke the atmosphere of the period. The 156 page book presents vivid stories focusing on Saint Josemaría’s early life, including his parents, sisters and brother, Isidoro (a childhood friend), teachers, etc.
Centennial of the pilgrimage of the Escriva family to Torreciudad

The year 2004 marks the centennial of the pilgrimage made in thanksgiving by the Escrivá family to the shrine of Our Lady of Torreciudad. They attributed the cure of their son, for whose cure the doctor in Barbastro had given up hope, to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. “My son, our Lady kept you in this world for something great,” Doña Dolores would sometimes tell young Josemaría.

In 1930, Saint Josemaría wrote in his personal journal: “My Lady and Mother! You have given me the grace of a vocation; you saved my life as a child; you have heard me, so many times!” He refers here to the miraculous cure that his parents obtained from Mary in 1904, when he was two years old. Andres Vázquez de Prada, one of the founder’s biographers, describes what happened: “Around that time he came down with a serious illness, possibly an acute infection... One evening, Dr. Ignacio Camps Valdovinos, the family doctor, came to visit the child. He was an experienced physician with a good clinical eye, but in those days there was no way to stop the course of a virulent infection... There came a moment when Dr. Camps had to say to Don José, ‘I'm sorry, Pepe, he won't make it through the night.’ With great faith, the parents went on asking God to cure their son. Doña Dolores trustingly began a novena to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and the couple promised our Lady that if their child recovered, they would take him on a pilgrimage to her shrine of Torreciudad.” Esperanza Corrales, at that time a neighbor of the Escrivá’s, recalls: “The sickness came to an unexpected crisis, and little Josemaría came through it despite the gloomy predictions of the doctors. When he had fully recovered, the Escrivá’s with the little boy in their arms fulfilled their promise of going as pilgrims to give thanks to Our Lady of Torreciudad.”

In another passage of his biography, Vázquez de Prada describes the pilgrimage: “On horseback, along winding mountain trails, they traveled the fourteen long miles. Doña Lola, riding sidesaddle and carrying the boy in her arms, was frightened by all the jolting they experienced between the crags and deep gorges plunging down to the Cinca River. Perched on a
steep hilltop is the shrine of Torreciudad. There, at the feet of our Lady, they offered the child in thanksgiving.”

The Inauguration of a street dedicated to St. Josemaria in Lucca, (Italy)

The first street dedicated to Saint Josemaría in the Italian province of Tuscany was inaugurated on October 6. The street, restricted to pedestrians and bicycles, is named Cammino di San Josemaría Escrivá. It crosses several streams on two small bridges and ends at the Via della Rosa, facing the house where St. Gemma Galgani died, very close to the apse of the Cathedral of St. Martin. The street’s total length is approximately 300 meters. Its cobblestones, which date to the sixteenth century, had recently been cleaned to prepare for the inauguration ceremony.

On October 5 an informative conference on Saint Josemaría took place in the Centro Agorà, where some 150 people viewed a projection of a get-together with the founder of Opus Dei filmed in 1974.

The ceremony of inauguration took place at the street itself, where a plaque was placed with the following inscription:

Saint Josemaría Escrivá opened up a new path of sanctification in the Catholic Church, reminding all men and women they can attain holiness if they carry out their work and daily activities with a Christian spirit.


Before uncovering the plaque, Mayor Pietro Fazzi of Lucca explained that the city council had wanted to hold the dedication in a place where many workers and tourists passed by because of the importance of the new saint’s message. A short speech was also given by Cosimo De Fazio, director of the Accademie dei Ponti, the center of Opus Dei in Florence, who described highlights of Saint Josemaría’s stay in Tuscany.
Torna ai contenuti
Pontifical Appointments

The Holy Father has appointed:

Rev. Ricardo García García, Bishop of Cañete-Yauyos, Peru; Bishop Klaus Küng, Bishop of St. Pölten, Austria; Rev. Rogelio Ricardo Livieres Plano, Bishop of Ciudad del Este, Paraguay; Bishop Jose H. Gomez, Archbishop of San Antonio, Texas.

He has also appointed Msgr. Ángel Rodríguez Luño as an ordinary member of the Pontifical Academy for Life; and Rev. Miguel de Salis and Rev. Alfonso Chacón as consultors to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Beginning of apostolic work in Latvia

Since last summer, faithful of Opus Dei—priests and laity—of various nationalities have been living in Riga, the capital of Latvia, having moved there to begin stable apostolic work of the Prelature in that country. The first center of Opus Dei in Riga is on Elizabetes iela street, in a residential section of the city. The faithful of Opus Dei who have moved to Riga exercise various professions. In Riga they have organized classes of Christian formation and, for the younger people, language courses and sports activities.

Establishment of new Centers of the Prelature

The Prelate’s vicars have established new centers of the Prelature in the following cities:

Belokozly (Czech Republic), Douala (Cameroun), Hong-Kong, Madrid, Nairobi (Kenya, two centers), San Salvador (El Salvador), and
Taipei (Taiwan).

Other News

During the second half of 2004, plenary meetings of the General Council and the Central Advisory were held. These meetings, convoked by the Prelate, are aimed at setting out the broad goals of the apostolic work of the Prelature, in its two sections, for the upcoming months.

Between November 25 and 29, people from various countries gathered in Castelromano, a conference center in Castelgandolfo, near Rome, to join efforts and share ideas on biomedical projects. Those taking part in the meeting also participated in a get-together with the Prelate of Opus Dei.

Around November 8, a Mass was said for the eternal rest of Bishop Adolfo Rodríguez Vidal in all of the centers of the Prelature in Chile on the first anniversary of his death. Bishop Rodríguez Vidal, who began the apostolic work of Opus Dei in that country in 1950, was born in Tarragona, Spain, in 1920, joined Opus Dei in 1940, and was ordained in 1948. He was Regional Vicar until 1988, the year in which he was named Bishop of Los Angeles, Chile. Saint Josemaría had also named him as his delegate for several countries in Latin America at various times. During the years when he was Vicar, and especially after the trip there of Saint Josemaría in 1974, the apostolic work begun in 1950 spread to many parts of Santiago and to many other Chilean cities such as San Fernando, Viña del Mar, Concepción and Antofagasta.
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
The fiftieth anniversary of the School of Medicine at the University of Navarre and the inauguration of the Medical Research Center (CIMA)

The University of Navarre Medical School celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in October. Its first steps began in 1954 with 18 students and a handful of enthusiastic professors—without a building or official recognition. It was the first private institution of this type founded in Spain after the war. For the mindset of that period it was a revolutionary project that many saw as an unrealizable dream.

The doctors and professors who began the project under the guidance of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, founder of the University of Navarre, had to build a medical school from scratch devoted both to teaching and research. Their efforts during these fifty years have resulted in the training of more than 6,700 professionals, a University Hospital and the recently inaugurated Medical Research Center—CIMA (Centro de Investigación Médica Aplicada).

Inauguration of CIMA

The new building was blessed by Archbishop Fernando Sebastian of Pamplona, and officially inaugurated on the following day in the presence of the Prince and Princess of Asturias. “Our goal is to carry out research that will help find solutions to patients’ suffering,” explained Francisco Errasti, the project’s general director. “CIMA has been born with the medical instinct to cure,” stressed Dr. Jesus Prieto, director of the Department of Gene Therapy and Hepatology. Prince Felipe of Asturias, in his address during the unveiling of a commemorative plaque, expressed his conviction that CIMA would lead to important advances in many fields of medicine. He made an especially moving reference to the University Hospital, where his grandfather, Don Juan de Borbón, the Count of Barcelona, spent his final months.

In his address, Archbishop Sebastian pointed to the transcendent mission of CIMA: “Your work demonstrates that the recognition of God
neither paralyzes nor blocks reason, the capacity for knowing reality and advancing in the betterment of man’s life. Faith in God from many points of view frees and strengthens the intellect, increasing its capacity for knowledge and adding new and stronger motivations...The knowledge of reality has to increase our admiration for the wisdom, power and goodness of God, who has created a world that is truly to the measure of man.”

At present CIMA’s efforts are concentrated on twenty-two research projects. These build on years of laboratory experience accumulated in the University of Navarre’s Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, and Science, and in the University Hospital. The four areas of research into which the activity of CIMA has been divided are Gene Therapy and Hepatology, Cardiovascular Pathophysiology, Neuroscience, and Oncology.

The work of CIMA will range from laboratory research and clinical trials to the obtaining of patents. Its novelty is based on the provision of the infrastructure necessary to integrate and strengthen the four areas of work selected, with the goal of clinical application. This has been achieved through an innovative model of financing which channels the social commitment of 15 institutions and biotechnical enterprises grouped in a UTE (Union Temporal de Empresas). The goal of these efforts is to work towards finding cures for a series of illnesses that, taken together, result in some 90 per cent of deaths in the West: hepatitis, cirrhosis, cardiac insufficiency, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, lung cancer, etc.

The fiftieth anniversary

A few days after the inauguration of CIMA, the Medical School celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with more than 450 alumni in attendance. The commemorative ceremonies began with Mass in the Cathedral of Pamplona, officiated by Father Pedro Álvarez de Toledo, Delegate Vicar of Opus Dei, and concelebrated by those who have been chaplains of the Medical School during the past fifty years, as well as by a number of graduates who are now priests.

Later, in the library of the School of Science, the directors of the four departments of CIMA presented their respective areas of research to the alumni. Also taking part in the ceremony were Pilar Civeira, dean of the Medical School, Maria Kutz, Health Counselor of the Government of
Navarre, and Yolanda Barcina, Mayor of Pamplona, who pointed out that the University of Navarre’s Medical School “is one of the pillars of the high quality of life in this city.”

In the evening, at an academic ceremony presided over by the Rector of the University, Maria Rosa Echeverría and Elica Brajnovic introduced a book about the medical school entitled, Fifty Years of Life, Memory and Hope, and a DVD commemorating the golden anniversary of the school.

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**In Brief**

**Turin, (Italy) -- A course in Italian culture for domestic workers**

The Riparia Cultural Center held the second series of classes for foreign women working in Italy. Some thirty women from such places as Peru, Bolivia, Rumania and Moldavia took part. Often these people, who have only a superficial knowledge of the Italian language and customs, encounter difficulties in fitting in outside their work, which normally is limited to the field of domestic services, especially care for children and the aged.

Classes are given on cooking for children and the aged. Those taking part are also given information to enable them to know and better appreciate the Italian city in which they are presently living. Other topics treated by the specialists giving the classes include home management, dietetics, and fitting into a new environment.

Very much appreciated is the lesson entitled “Reflections on friendship.” The ages of the participants, ranging from twenty to over fifty, has not been an obstacle to establishing an atmosphere of solidarity and mutual respect.
Paris, (France) -- Europe a lively debate

In the Les Ecoles student residence, located in the heart of the Latin Quarter, symbol of the Parisian university and cultural tradition, a day of reflection on Europe’s past and future was held on October 14. Students from a number of different fields of study filled the auditorium of the residence. The interest that the topic stirred up was shown in the questions directed to the speakers and in the groups that were formed at the end of the meeting to informally debate such questions as the European constitution, the expansion of the European Union to new countries, the Christian roots of Europe, etc.

Elizabeth Montfort, a former European Deputy and author of the book Dieu a-t-il sa place en Europe? (Is there a place for God in Europe?), opened the meeting with a discussion of the history of the recognition of human rights in France, without which it would be difficult to understand today’s France. She gave a balance sheet of Europe today, and emphasized the urgent need to find a clear identity and common values consistent with its history.

Michel Rouche, a professor at the Sorbonne, also spoke about Europe’s common heritage. He described how, thanks to evangelization, two worlds were able to interpenetrate each other and give rise to a new culture which can with all propriety be called “Christian”: the Roman world, formed in the civil law, and the pagan world, in which force and violence reigned.

Remi Forycky, professor of literature and director of the Polish Library in Paris, acted as spokesman for Europe’s eastern “lung.” He described the geopolitical position of some countries in Eastern Europe such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, and pointed out that Europe exists fundamentally because the majority of its inhabitants share the same roots.
Auckland (New Zealand) -- Training of catechists

Fernhall Study Centre opened in 1999. It carries out a program of bi-weekly activities during the academic year and summer camps for girls aged 10 to 16.

In 2004 Fernhall organized a camp to prepare secondary school students as catechists and as counsellors for its summer camps. Girls from Auckland, Wellington, and Hamilton took part.

The program included practical sessions on teaching methods and a review of the content of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, with special stress on the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. A special class was dedicated to explaining the parts of the Mass. A film forum provided material for reflecting on the value of friendship and on love for the truth. On the final day, the participants had the opportunity to take part in a day of recollection, as a means of growing in friendship with Christ and in their prayer life.

Over the course of the four days, students experienced an environment of service and cheerfulness. Some of the girls will take part as counsellors in the next Fernhall camp. Realizing the importance of their role, they will take it on with a great sense of responsibility.

Quezon City, (Philippines) -- The Internet and public opinion

In June, young professional women from various parts of The Philippines took part in a seminar on public opinion held at the University of Asia and the Pacific. The seminar focused on the use of the Internet as a means to awaken public awareness in relation to topics of concern to women.
One of the results of the seminar was “Project IPO” (Internet and Public Opinion). A web site was created and seven topics were identified as areas for research and action. Each member of the group was assigned a topic. Among the commentaries received at the IPO web site were a number on the question of population, on natural family planning, and on the document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and in the world. In addition to the contribution made to on-line debates, those in charge of the IPO were greatly encouraged by the reaction to their campaigns.

Participants in the on-line discussions included Mary Warren, Patti Francomacaro and Jeanette Kendall, who were involved in getting the “Elegance in Style” initiative underway. Diane Uichangco, a well known freelance writer in the Philippines, also took part, as well as members of the Alliance for the Family, Inc., a local NGO specializing in legislative campaigns.

Kampala, (Uganda) -- International rural project

University women from Uganda and Spain joined forces in a work camp from July 4 to 24 in Kampala, organized by Teemba Study Centre, the Kyoga Foundation and Goimendi Student Residence in the University of Navarre.

Their principal activity was repairing the dormitory of Santa Maria Goretti high school and that of a school for orphans in Munyonyo, Gaba. They also built a chicken coop with the intention of teaching the small children how to raise and care for poultry, something that will be useful to them in the future and at the same time provide a supplement to their diet. When they finished building the coop they christened it Kikiriki 2004.

While the construction was underway, the girls received classes in English and mathematics, as well as some sessions of human formation.

The students also visited a center for the care of AIDS-patients in
Banda, and spent a morning in Kivulu, a poor neighborhood of Makerere where the *Club Medfriends*, made up of medical students, provides a mobile clinic. The young volunteers gave the Club medicine and equipment as well as clothes, toys, and school material for the children and their families.

Valencia, (Spain) -- Fashions, Communication and Society

On November 13, more than a hundred professionals in the fields of fashion and the media took part in the 25th conference organized by the COSO Foundation, under the title “Fashions, Communication and Society.”

The conference, held at the Valencian Institute of Modern Art, began with two talks entitled “The Image of Fashion” and “Creating Fashion, Creating Culture,” given by Marcea Castillo, a philologist, and Monica Codina, a professor of public communication at the University of Navarre. Pepa Ortiz, director of the International Fair of Children’s Fashions, spoke on “Fashion as a Driving Force in the Economy.” Finally, Jose Luis Cañas spoke on “Fashion Addictions.”

The first round table, entitled “The media, the other showcase of fashion,” was conducted by the persons in charge of fashion for the magazine *Elle* (Marta Barcia), and for the newspapers *El País* (Roger Salas) and *Las Provincias* (Mara Calabuig).

The second round table was made up of the designers, Lorenzo Caprile, Presen Rodrigue, Alejandro Saez de la Torre, and Alex Vidal, who discussed the relationship between creators of fashion and the media.

Bogota, (Colombia) Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of La Sabana University
Over one thousand people attended the ceremony commemorating the 25th anniversary of La Sabana University on October 14, in a part of the campus known as the Plazoleta de Los Balcones.

A Te Deum sung in thanksgiving was led by Msgr. Hernan Salcedo Plazas, Vice-Chancellor of the University and Vicar of Opus Dei in Colombia.

Afterwards, the Vice-Chancellor and the current Rector spoke a few words of special recognition for those who had served as past Rectors of the university: Octavio Arizmendi Posada, the first Rector, who could not attend because of sickness and who died a few weeks later, Rafael Gonzalez Cajigas, and Maria Adela Tamés Garcia.

Johannesburg, (South Africa) -- A course in hospitality and tourism

In November the first graduation of young women from Lakeview Catering School took place. The school opened in Johannesburg in February with four students from rural areas of South Africa. Lakeview is an initiative of the Komati Foundation for Women’s Development, whose aim is to provide training in the area of hospitality and tourism to girls who have finished their secondary studies.

Besides their classes related to the service sector such as cooking, laundry, and housekeeping, the girls did practical work in prestigious hotels and restaurants of the city. They also received ethical and moral formation through classes, videos, case studies, and tutorials.

The young women expressed their gratitude to Saint Josemaría for having opened up, through his teachings, a new panorama of service through work. Their academic year ended with a Mass of thanksgiving celebrated by the school’s chaplain.
Kreuzweingarten, (Germany) -- Dare to develop your own personality

The Haus Hardtberg Center for Home Economics has organized for the second time a seminar for girls in the final years of high school. Under the title “Dare to develop your own personality,” the assistants were given the opportunity to project themselves into the future, looking at their responsibilities and challenges, guided by a selected group of speakers.

The first talk was by Countess Plettenberg, who discussed communication in the family and at school. A lively discussion followed her talk. The afternoon session dealt with the question of good manners, as an integral part of interpersonal relations and a decisive factor in consolidating one’s own personality.

With the help of Elisabeth Püllen, director of the Department of Continual Formation at the Bonn School of Nursing, the girls learned the basic requirements for good communication with patients. These came down to knowing how to be quiet, listening actively and learning to read between the lines.

The second day focussed on the topic of “rhythm.” The talk in the morning was dedicated to health, food and sports. Doctor Zimmermann emphasized the need to recognize the rhythms of nature and time, so as to find one’s own vital rhythm. “In order to enjoy life one has to learn how to renounce things,” said the doctor from the Mühle Therapeutic Center in Trier. Fashion designer Susanne Srobl, from Augsburg, told those present that style not only reflects the occasion that calls for it, but also expresses one’s personality, one’s attitude towards life. Christine Vogl, a cook with an advanced degree in home economics, gave the students an opportunity to put into practice things they had learned by organizing a buffet to close the conference.

Torna ai contenuti

Libson, (Portugal) -- Europe, know yourself
This was the title of a series of six conferences held from April to November in the auditorium of the Oratory of Saint Josemaría, in Lisbon. The sessions were aimed at providing a forum for reflection on the new evangelization of Europe in accord with the ideas expressed by John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*.

The conferences were part of the preparation for the ICNE (International Conference on the New Evangelization), which will be held in 2005 in the Patriarchate of Lisbon.

The topics and speakers were as follows: “Christians in the Face of the World (Dis)order” by law professor Mario Pinto; “The Culture of Life: Education for Life,” by Congressman Antonio Pinheiro Torres; “Culture and Life Styles in Europe,” by philosophy professor Luisa Couto Soares; and “The Singularity of the Family,” by Margarida Neto, the national commissioner for family matters.

The inaugural conference, entitled “The Mission in the City: the New Evangelization,” was given by Canon Carlos Paes of the Diocese of Lisbon, who is in charge of organizing ICNE in Lisbon.

Cardinal Jose da Cruz Policarpo, Patriarch of Lisbon, closed the series with a talk entitled “New Challenges: the Cultural Reality of Europe.”

Taipei, (Taiwan) -- Volunteers with the aged

From July 16 to 23, volunteers from Wen Shan Residence organized a service project in the *Ang Kang Community* with the help of some friends from Singapore. The young women volunteers, divided into pairs, visited the homes of the elderly, spoke with them and helped them in domestic tasks. They also organized activities outside their homes, for example, accompanying them on visits to their neighbors.

At the end of each day, the volunteers met with the social assistants from the community to evaluate their work and plan activities for the
following days.

Once the project was finished, a report was written on each of the homes visited. Its purpose was to keep local authorities up to date on the situations of the elderly people they visited. The authorities expressed gratitude for the girls’ generosity, who in some cases had asked for a work permit to be able to take part in this project.

Buenos Aires, (Argentina) -- A Conference on the family

A conference on the family was held at the La Chacra conference center outside Buenos Aires on September 27, 2004. Some 100 people attended, most of them mothers. The conference began with a class on family values given by Father Jorge Fraile, the Vicar of Opus Dei for the Delegation of Buenos Aires. Following this a round table discussion was held with four speakers, who explained various initiatives assisting the family in which they are involved.

The speakers included Monica del Rio, from the Women’s Civic Organization, whose principal activity is keeping track of legislation on the family, and Adrian Dall’Asta, executive director of the “Fathers’ Project” Foundation. Also taking part were Santiago Carrillo, organizer of Padres en Red (Fathers on line), a web page that seeks to provide healthy forms of adolescent entertainment, and Andrea Saporitti, from the Institute of Sciences for the Family at Austral University, who spoke about the program of family orientation that is organized there.

The conference continued with the projection of a documentary film on social development projects in Argentina inspired by the teachings of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, and concluded with a conference entitled “Marriage Crises” by Felicitas Walker de Medina, a family counsellor.
Sao Paulo, (Brazil) -- Ethics and citizenship

The “University Extension Center,” a corporate work of Opus Dei in São Paulo, organized in June a seminar to help citizens discover channels through which they could have a positive influence on public life.

The first speaker, Ives Gandra Martins, minister of the Superior Court for labor questions, spoke on the history of civic action dating back to ancient Greece, and suggested that the gradual loss of a sense of community is leading to the disintegration of Western culture. Margoth Giacomazzi Martins, a labor judge, Paula Nelli Dionigi, attorney for the state of São Paulo, and Paulo Restiffe Neto, a magistrate, responded to questions from those attending.

In the second talk, Carlos Alberto De Franco, a journalist and director of the Master's Program in Journalism at the University Extension Center, spoke about some practical instruments that citizens have at their disposal. He stressed the role of the media in civic formation and urged that these channels be used by citizens to express their point of view in society.

Soraya Marciano Silva, a federal attorney, Laudo Arthur, a lawyer, and Angelo Patricio Stachine, district attorney for São Paulo, filled out the round table and, as in the previous session, responded to questions from the public.

Santiago, (Chile) -- UNIV 2005: Projecting culture ---the language of music

Araucaria Residence and Cultural Center was the site of the national phase of UNIV 2005 Congress, which took place on November 6 and 7, 2004.

The work sessions consisted in the presentation of reports prepared by students. These alternated with musical presentations and two round-table discussions entitled “Culture and Music” and “Music and Identity.” Among the participants were Fernando Rozas, president of the Beethoven
Foundation and director of the Foundation for Children’s Orchestras; Carmen Luisa Letelier, member of the Academy of Fine Arts and professor at the School of Music in the University of Chile; Waldemar Sommer, art critic for the newspaper *El Mercurio* and a professor at the University of the Andes; and Juan Antonio Muñoz, a music critic.

An award was given to the project “Ventana a la musica” (Window on music), an internet site which, for the purpose of encouraging values and virtues, puts music within the reach of all, spreading the words of songs with constructive lyrics, positive life stories, scores that can be shared with friends, a forum for rankings, etc. “Window on music” enables people to search for lyrics according to topics such as peace, hope, love, generosity, solidarity, life, friendship….

The women’s singing group *Allegro Andante* presented its experiences in providing choral music. *Allegro andante* brings together women of various ages, occupations and walks of life, who share the ideal of developing music as a service to those in need. During the year they visit hospitals, children’s homes and homes for the aged, seeking to bring with them the joy of their performances and thus help alleviate suffering.

**Rio de Janeiro, (Brazil) -- In a fishing village**

Seven years ago, the Association for Educational and Cultural Development (ADEC) established by faithful of the Prelature and Cooperators, began a series of social development activities in Jurujuba, a small fishing village on the edge of Niteroi in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The program includes various initiatives in education, crafts, health and recreation for children and adolescents. It arose as a way of putting into practice the spirit of Saint Josemaría, who, by his example and teachings, encouraged many people to put their professional knowledge at the service of others.
Seeing the difficulties faced by the wives of the fishermen, a group of women volunteers sponsored activities of benefit to them and their families. Thus an Association of Fishermen’s Wives was formed to help the women raise the human tone of their homes and families. With the aid of a nutritionist, a series of cooking classes was also organized. Free legal services were offered to the local population through the help of a number of volunteer lawyers.

A nearby community center had a small library that was not being used. The volunteer group cleaned and classified the books in order to encourage the children to read. During 2004 they also began a project called “Health in the Home,” directed by nurses who visited families, gave them advice, and assisted them with their health needs.

Nairobi, (Kenya) -- Judicial ethics and ontology

A conference on judicial ethics was held at Strathmore University on October 29 and 30. Some 400 people took part, mostly lawyers. Kenya’s Vice President, Moody Awori, opened the sessions. Among those in attendance was the representative of the European Union and the Executive Director of the Nation Media Group, the most important group of communications media in East Africa.

During the conference, among other points, the need for encouraging the study of natural law was emphasized for countries that follow the Anglo-Saxon juridical system, as a way of combating corruption more effectively. Among the speakers were Msgr. Cormac Burke, former judge of the Roman Rota; Amos Wako, Attorney General of Kenya; John Githongo, Permanent Secretary of the Office of the President; Patrick Lumumba, Secretary of the Commission for Constitutional Reform in Kenya; Smokin Wanjala, Subdirector of the Anti-Corruption Commission; and Professors Rafael Alvira and Alejo Sisón, from the University of Navarre.
La Paz, (Bolivia) -- Tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

In honor of the tenth anniversary of the *International Year of the Family*, a group of professional men, among them several members of the Prelature, decided to organize a family conference in the city of La Paz under the theme: “The Family: a sure refuge in a time of crisis.”

The gathering was covered by the media, and given support by educational institutions and especially by fathers and mothers seeking effective help in resolving the problems that the family is currently confronted by.

The conference was attended by some 200 people: young couples and those with adolescent children, high school teachers from various schools, representatives of the press, etc.

The topics that provoked the most interest were: communication in marriage, maturity in married love, the authority of parents, and the prevention of alcoholism and drug addiction.

Jonacatepec, (Mexico) -- Summer course in English

A group of high school and university students from the United States traveled to Mexico from July 10 to August 1 under the auspices of *Youth Service International* (YSI) to take part as volunteers in a service project at El Peñón school in Jonacatepec, in the state of Morelos.

For more than ten years, El Peñón has organized an English course for its own students and for boys from neighboring villages. YSI provides the teaching staff of young volunteers from the United States. It also provides subsidies to enable the volunteers to take part in projects to assist needy
families. This summer they constructed a two-room brick house for a family.

During their stay in Mexico, the young men also gave catechism classes in the local parish.

Queretaro, (Mexico) -- In the Sierra Gorda

Thirteen years ago Club Amay, in Queretaro, organized the first rural development project in the area known as the “Sierra Gorda.” This summer fifteen students from Queretaro took part in the latest version of this now traditional volunteer activity. With the support of local authorities and the help of individual contributors and students of other nationalities (on this occasion, Canadians), this project has grown stronger each year.

The place chosen this year was in the village of Temascales. Each morning the young women volunteers, riding in a flatbed truck, were driven to the project’s site. The bumps caused by potholes in the road were smoothed over by the joy of the assistance they were going to provide. The first activity consisted in imparting catechism classes. Classes in handicrafts were also offered, which helped entertain the children and enabled the mothers to relax and chat among themselves. The most difficult part of the project involved installing stoves and fruit drying ovens, among other reasons because it was the first time many of the volunteers had worked with steel sheeting, hammers, wheelbarrows, sand, and other construction materials. Thanks to the professional instruction of several experts, the results turned out quite well; and the people in the neighborhood learned techniques they could use in the future.

Another objective of the work camp was to repair the village chapel. After their efforts, on the last day of the camp, it was possible to celebrate Holy Mass there.
Sydney, (Australia) -- Work camp in a fishing village

In July, a group of 30 Australian high school and university students dedicated three weeks of their winter vacation to a work camp in Maggona on the west coast of Sri-Lanka. The local authorities had asked Nairana Study Centre in Sydney to coordinate a social service project to help remedy some needs in the village.

Maggona is a fishing village 30 miles south of the Sri-Lankan capital, Colombo. It is a community with few financial resources but a rich cultural tradition.

The group of volunteers was divided into four working teams. One of the teams dedicated its time to installing a computer room at the local school. The computers had been donated by the University of Sydney. Another team took on the job of building a large concrete ramp on the beach so that the fishermen could deposit their fish and weigh them on the scale that they installed.

The third team dedicated its energies to rebuilding a community hall for meetings. Among other things they plastered and painted the building. The last team spent its time painting the interior of the Catholic parish church, constructed in the 19th Century. They also built a small shrine dedicated to the Blessed Virgin on a nearby hill, as a place of pilgrimage for the local inhabitants.

At the end of the work camp, the villagers showed their gratitude for the energetic work of the volunteers by giving a going away feast. The group was invited to return the following year. Given the extensive Tsunami damage in the area, such a return trip is under consideration.

Asuncion, (Paraguay) -- Conference on the family
With a view to providing both information and formation to couples, the Family Institute of the CEDOC foundation organized an international congress on the family, on September 11 and 12.

About 200 people took part in the conferences, panels and workshops. The president of the conference, Jose Luis Silva, greeted the attendees and stressed the importance of the institution of the family for the destiny of humanity and the role of parents in the formation of their children, the depositaries of the future of society.

Among the topics covered during the two days of sessions were: “Social and Family Commitment” by Roberto Bosca; “Woman and the Family” by Ana Sanguineti; “Harmony in the Family” by Christian Conen; and “The Family in the Media and Advertising” by Benjamin Fernandez Bogado.

Jorge Scala, a lawyer, university professor and member of the International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education (OIDEL), gave a lecture on “The Family and International Policy,” in which he stressed the relationship between anti-birth policies and various economic interests.

An interfaith panel discussion was held that featured Juan Elison, an Anglican bishop, Rabbi Marcel Wajcer, Pastor David Krivorotoff and Father Juan Maria Gallardo. The exchange made clear the common basis that exists for joint interreligious work in defense of the family.

Those taking part included the Minister for Children and Adolescents, the Minister for Women's Affairs, representatives from the judiciary, and a number of school principles. The First Lady also sent a message of support that was made public at the closing session.

Montevideo, (Uruguay) -- University Conference on Fashion

On October 7 and 8, the University of Montevideo brought together designers, photographers, students taking courses in design and
communication, journalists who cover fashion, publicists and representatives of the textile industry, so that through dialogue and in the light of Christian faith, they might seek ways of having a more positive influence on their professional environment.

The opening conference was given by Raul Lagomarsino, professor at the University of Montevideo. Also speaking were Isidoro Hodara, Vice President of Zonamerica, and Cecilia Dran from the Ministry of Industry. A study by the business school of the University of Montevideo (IEEM) was also presented showing the role of exports related to this sector in the national economy.

The second theme-module was centered on the relationship between the media and fashion. Isabel Robertson, a teacher and consultant in this field, analyzed the role of fashion throughout history. She noted that there was no specific area in the media that specialized in the critique of fashion. She suggested that developing sound and consistent criteria in this field would be a great help for both designers and consumers.

Eileen Hudson, a professor of Social Communication, discussed the presence of fashion in the Uruguayan media. In the following presentation, Carolina Curat, a designer for various Argentinean magazines, expressed her views on fashion as depicted in the media in which she works.

The event was attended by directors and journalists from the most widely distributed fashion magazines in Uruguay, as well as by other professionals in the communications field.
IN PACE
Faithful of Opus Dei and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who died in the second half of 2004

In the second half of 2004, 236 faithful of the Prelature and 22 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross passed away.

The suffrages stipulated by Saint Josemaría have been offered for these deceased. As we continue to pray for them, let us thank God for the example they left us through their fidelity in striving to transform their professional work and the ordinary circumstances of their lives into an occasion for loving God and serving the Church and all souls. Their love for God constitutes the meaning and value of their lives, whether outstanding in the eyes of others, or whether quite ordinary, as was true in most cases.

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A STUDY
Woman in the Divine Economy: From the Church Fathers to St. Josemaría

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In a homily on the Blessed Virgin, St. Josemaría Escrivá speaks of the “logic of God” (la lógica de Dios). He says that when we meditate on Mary’s assent to God and the hidden and ordinary sacrifices of her day, we understand better the logic of God. As he uses the phrase, the logic of God has something to do with the paradox of our lives having supernatural value through small daily sacrifices. Sharing in the divine, being as like to God as a human being can be, comes about through sacrifices that are in worldly terms insignificant, mean or mundane, perhaps fraught with weakness or unattractive. St. Josemaría goes on to say, “To become God-like, to be divinized, we must begin by being very human, accepting from God our condition as ordinary men and sanctifying its apparent worthlessness.”[2] God’s logic thus is worked out through everyday life and is the route to our being like Him.

This passage, I will argue, is a particularly revealing example of a theme present throughout the writings of St. Josemaría and dependent on the early Fathers of the Church.[3] This theme is the economy (oikonomia) of salvation (economía divina, in Escrivá’s words). This theme has acquired great general significance and wide connotation in Catholic theology. In contrast to this wide ocean of implication, it is the precision with which St. Josemaría characterizes the economy of salvation that traces a specific connection between his thought and the Church Fathers. Because of the role of Mary, Theotokos—the one who bore God—in the formulation of economy, a particularly good way to approach his thought on women is to begin with this theme in his writing. The exploration of this theme shows that Escrivá’s thought on the subject of women is integrated into his theology and spirituality in general. It hinges on Mary’s role in the divine economy, but she is an example not just for women but for all. The graced human nature of the woman is thus integral to his whole conception of the lay mentality. One implication of this is that his theology treats men and
women very much alike, as children of God. We might think that this is not news. But given the tendency in present-day theology to highlight the differences in the psychology of men and women, it is important to note that this was not St. Josemaría’s starting point. What I shall present is, I think, the background that should be brought to an evaluation of other things that Escrivá says about women. I will address two specific things he says concerning women as I conclude.

The economy of salvation according to the Greek Fathers

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and St. Irenaeus of Lyons were among the earliest Christian thinkers who used the term oikonomia to describe the dispensation—or distribution—of the persons of the Trinity in relation to the Son’s salvific action in the world. Oikonomia has to do, not with the mystery of God’s inner Trinitarian life, but with the ways that God reveals Himself to man. The word, oikonomia—from oikos, house or home, and nomos, usage, custom, or law—originally meant the art of household management. In the Hellenistic period, the term was applied variously to a man’s management of his property, to a wife’s management of a household, or to the good ordering of the cosmos. It also had a connotation of an environment in which the management of something complex could be successful. Oikonomia was used by Greek grammarians to refer to the organization of a poem or to the arrangement of a plot, so that the story is convincing or achieves its denouement. The use of the term by Christian thinkers in relation to God’s intervention in human history originates with Paul. In Ephesians 1:10, Paul uses the term to refer to God’s management of salvation history, the summing up (anakephalaiôsis) of all things in Christ, thing both in heaven and on the earth. In Ephesians 3:9, Paul speaks of this management of the mystery of salvation as being brought to light after having been for ages hidden in God. An important aspect of God’s economy and a prominent theme of the Church Fathers, was that the full meaning of the Old Testament was unperceived until Christ entered the world. Now we see that, in accordance with God’s management, Jesus the Christ is the second Adam. The Incarnation and Resurrection are thus God’s scheme or device for redeeming man and nature. Oikonomia refers to a syntax or logic of
redemption that reflects God’s own voluntary observance of the rules of natural life He instituted at creation.

Mary and the reason for the Incarnation

A very early formulation of the economy of salvation is the following one from St. Ignatius, second bishop of Antioch after Peter and a martyr of the 1st century:

For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary, according to the economy of God, of the seed of David, but by the Holy Spirit.

Ho gar Theos hêmôn Iêsous ho Christos ekuophorêthê hupo Marias kat’oikonomian Theou ek spermatos men Daveid, pneumatos de hagiou.[10]

It might seem that only the presence of the word oikonomia in this passage distinguishes it from any cursory statement of the basic belief of Christians. What is important, however, is that this statement is a formula of how God performed or brought about the redemption of mankind. It states an action, the entrance into nature and history of the second Person of the Trinity, that implies an achievement, the redemption. There are parts to the plan of redemption, tasks, so to speak, that are apportioned to different persons, Jesus, Mary, David, and the Holy Spirit. Redemption is thus articulated into parts, and this formula makes sense of the relation of the parts. Lacking in this formula is a reference to the second Person of the Trinity as the Logos, Word. Following the Gospel of John, the Church Fathers used this term for the relation of the Son to the Father before or apart from the Incarnation. The Logos is appropriately one part of the formula of redemption. Ignatius’ formulation does include the central role of Mary in the economy of salvation. God assumed flesh and entered history by being born not made—that is, in the way most fitting to human life. The significance given to Mary’s role in this formula by the Fathers is clear in their discussions of the right preposition to use for her God-bearing. The Greek preposition, hupo, in St. Ignatius’ formulation, can have a connotation of causal or personal agency. It is combined with the word for being pregnant, kuophoreô, to describe Mary’s conceiving. Christ was conceived and carried in the womb by Mary. St. Basil later insists that we should not say Christ was born dia gunaikos—by means of a
woman—but rather _ek gunaikos_—of or out of a woman—so that it is clear He was indeed her son and did not simply pass through her body.\[^{11}\] The point is, of course, to maintain with clarity that Christ is both God and fully human—as St. Josemaría repeatedly says, using the formulation of the Athanasian Creed, _perfectus Deus, perfectus homo_. Scholars point to the Christological controversies of the early Church as the context for this discussion of Mary, but emphasis should also be placed on the understanding, emerging during this period of time, of the reason for this manner of redemption. This reason is made precise in the Fathers’ formulation of _oikonomia_.

Roughly put, God redeemed mankind in this way to preserve creation, which was itself good. In _The Great Catechism_ , Gregory of Nyssa addresses the question of why God chose this form of redemption. Against those who say it is demeaning to God to take on the weakness and humiliation of the human state, Gregory says that

... in the whole nature of things, one thing only is disgraceful, and that is vicious weakness (_to kata kakian pathos_); while whatever has no connection with vice is a stranger to all disgrace; and whatever has no mixture in it of disgrace is certainly to be found on the side of the beautiful; and what is really beautiful has in it no mixture of its opposite. Now whatever is to be regarded as coming within the sphere of the beautiful becomes the character of God (_prepei tôi Theoi_). Either, then, let them show that there was viciousness in His birth, His bringing up, His growth, His progress to the perfection of His nature, His experience of death and return from death; or, if they allow that the aforesaid circumstances of His life remain outside the sphere of viciousness, they will perforce admit that there is nothing of disgrace in this that is foreign to viciousness.\[^{12}\]

Notable in this passage is the catalogue of natural events in Christ’s life. Such a catalogue appears in many formulations of divine economy among the Fathers. In this case, the catalogue highlights the fact that the circumstances of Christ’s birth and life were among the goods of nature given to humans. Gregory says later in _The Great Catechism_,

If you take away from life the benefits that come to us from God, you would not be able to tell me what means you have of arriving at any
knowledge of Deity. In the kindly treatment of us we recognize the benefactor; that is, from observation of that which happens to us, we conjecture the disposition of the person who operates it (ch. XV).

This is a description of a posteriori argument from the nature of things to God’s nature. The clues to God’s goodness present in nature are a favorite theme of Gregory, and this theme depends on the integrity and trustworthiness of human experience. Gregory begins his explanation of the reason for the Incarnation with a robust confidence in the goodness of the natural forms of human life.

In Gregory’s understanding, Christ reunited the human soul and body separated by the first sin, restoring the good human nature. Just as Adam’s sin had extended to all of humanity, the principle of the Resurrection extends from one man to the whole human race (ch. XVII). For Gregory, the Incarnation and the Passion had to be taken together to understand the manner of redemption. It is evidence of God’s oikonomía and its revelation through nature and history that He did not prevent the dissolution of Christ’s body in death. Instead, he brought soul and body back together in the resurrection, overcoming death. If it is asked why God did not redeem humankind by a simple fiat of will, Gregory replies that the sick cannot dictate to their physicians the measures for their healing (ch. XVII). God’s economy is a regimen of healing. That Christ is our Physician was also a formulation of St. Ignatius. He uses this description of Christ to emphasize that He is “possessed both of flesh and spirit... both from Mary and from God (kai ek Marias kai ek Theou ).”[13] Thus, calling Christ physician emphasizes God’s cooperation with nature and the humanity of Christ’s origin. It also shows that God’s oikonomía is known to us in the manner of technê, a craft like medicine or mechanics. A technê follows the contours of nature to overcome nature. A lever or pulley overcomes weight through a particular arrangement of forces. A physician draws on the healing power of the body to overcome sickness. In the case of God’s economy, He accomplishes through nature what we could not achieve on our own, the overcoming of Adam’s sin.

Redemption and the events of everyday life
Most crafts have a workshop, a place where the material task is acted out and accomplished. St. Basil says that the workshop (ergastêrion) of this healing oikonomia was the body (sôma) of Mary.\footnote{14} St. Irenaeus explains vividly what it was that Christ needed from the Virgin Mary:

And if he had received nothing from Mary, he would never have taken foods derived from the earth; after fasting forty days like Moses and Elijah he would not have felt hunger because his body needed food; John his disciple would not have written of him: “Jesus sat, wearied from the journey” (John 4:6);... He would not have wept over Lazarus (John 11:35); he would not have sweated drops of blood (Luke 22:44); he would not have said “My soul grieves” (Matthew 26:38), nor would blood and water have come forth from his pierced side (John 19:34). All these are signs of flesh taken from the earth, which he recapitulated in himself, saving what he had formed.\footnote{15}

We see once more, in Irenaeus’ account, the catalogue of natural events in a life, understood now in terms of their purpose of redemption. In this connection, Irenaeus refers to Mary as the one who untied the “knot” (nodus) of Eve’s disobedience.\footnote{16} The image of untying a knot bespeaks the order necessary for redemption by means of nature and the very specific steps that must be taken to accomplish it: “For what has been tied cannot be loosed unless one reverses the ties of the knot so that the first ties are undone by the second, and the second free the first....”\footnote{17} Christ had to recapitulate human history begun by Adam to bring about our salvation, St. Irenaeus says, but Mary had to reverse the disobedience of Eve. Thus, there is an inner logic to the redemption discernible to us as how the job would be done by a supernatural physician working with the materials of nature. Mary’s humanity, her flesh (sarx), is indispensable to the Physician’s plan, because he means to preserve the material and spiritual nature of the human being as a unitary whole.

In sum, God saved humankind through an economy appropriate to man’s material nature. For this reason, the forms into which human life by nature falls are significant for salvation. Gregory specifically mentions, in catalogue form, Jesus’ birth, growth from infancy to maturity, eating and drinking, fatigue and sleep, sorrow and tears, as well as the events of his Passion—to insist that God’s contact with human nature is not demeaning.
God not only restored human nature, however. The second person of the Trinity perfected human nature by being free of the passions that tend toward vice while taking on the natural experiences that constitute the full goodness of human beings as human.[18] This means that not only are the ordinary forms of life significant for salvation but because God lived them as a human being, they are ennobled and made more valuable in themselves. This is a splendid scheme indeed because, subsequent to the Son’s entrance into history, this bettered human condition is available to every person. To produce a catalogue parallel to Gregory’s—being born, living by belief, perception, and knowledge, creating, achieving, experiencing pain, loving, marrying, having children, ageing and expecting death—these are all activities suitable to be graced by God.[19]

In this connection, we should note Gregory’s theme of God’s great love for man, philanthrôpia, on account of which He assumed the fragility and humiliation of human limitation. The two themes of oikonomia and philanthrôpia are closely related for Gregory. The Greek word phileô means to cleave to or cherish something or someone, to hold a person dear. Prefixed to the word for human being (anthrôpos), philo- connotes God’s holding human beings so dear that He took on flesh to lift human nature out of sin.[20] The Incarnation constitutes a new regime in which this merciful love for humans remains in the world. One of the Latin words used to translate oikonomia is dispositio, a word that acquired in later philosophical Latin the meaning of settled condition or state. Something of this connotation is present in its use to translate oikonomia. The sharing of God’s nature by the three Divine Persons, the Son and Holy Spirit themselves, and the new condition prevailing after the Incarnation were all referred to by the word oikonomia or dispositio. They are all stable conditions defining the real. Adopting a modern scientific metaphor, we could say that, for Gregory, we now live in an atmosphere of God’s loving condescension and mercy that has re-valued human life. As an atmosphere, God’s redemptive love surrounds and saturates human beings. Gregory describes the Incarnation as precisely the philanthropic economy (oikonomia philanthrôpos).

*The philanthropic economy in St. Josemaría’s thought*
In the theology of St. Josemaría, oiokonomia and philanthrôpia are closely allied. One of the most striking themes in the homilies is the value imparted to human life by God’s great love for humankind. Escrivá focuses on the expressions of this love materially and in the terms to which humans are receptive. He writes of how wonderful it is “for God to love with a man’s heart” (PB, 108). Describing Jesus’ “refinement and affection” in his care of his friends—in this case, providing a meal for his friends along the seashore, St. Josemaría says, “All this human behavior is the behavior of God” (PB, 109). Recalling it, “we are doing much more than describing a pattern of human behavior; we are discovering God.” Echoing one of Gregory’s themes, he says:

If we enter into the theology of it instead of limiting ourselves to functional categories, we cannot say that there are things—good, noble or indifferent—which are exclusively worldly. This cannot be after the Word of God has lived among the children of men, felt hunger and thirst, worked with his hands, experienced friendship and obedience and suffering and death (PB, 112).

Twice Escrivá refers to St. Ignatius of Antioch’s call “Come to the Father,” which he takes as the anticipation of Ignatius’ martyrdom. St. Josemaría says in this context that in the love of God are found “all the noble loves which you had on earth” (FG, 221). In this comment on Ignatius, we see the economic Trinity, the relation of Father and Son under the aspect of the intimacy between God and creatures. Loves in the order of nature are noble, because created and because redeemed. Furthermore, they are the means of God’s drawing us, like a magnet, to Himself.

In The Great Catechism, Gregory emphasizes Christ being our priest and healer. It is because Christ lived an ordinary human life that we have salvation. He goes on to say, however, that whoever desires the good as Christ did must also imitate Him (ch. XXXV). The theme of imitation of Christ and instruction by Him is even stronger in St. Clement of Alexandria, who links both imitation and instruction to God’s philanthrôpia. In his Paedagogus, Clement says, “The Lord ministers all good and all help, both as man and as God: as God, forgiving our sins, and as man, training us not to sin.” In this context, Clement says that man is an object desirable in himself. “But what is loveable, and is not also loved
by Him? And man has been proved to be loveable; consequently man is loved by God” (I, ch. 3). He develops at length the theme of instruction in relation to being children of God. He insists that being children of God does not imply that our instruction is elementary or childish. Speaking of Christ, Clement says:

But He is perfected by the washing—of baptism—alone, and is sanctified by the descent of the Spirit? Such is the case. The same also takes place in our case, whose exemplar Christ became. Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal. “I,” says He, “have said that ye are gods, and all sons of the Highest.”[23] This work is variously called grace, and illumination, and perfection, and washing.... (I, ch. 6).

Christ is our teacher precisely by our being now capable of imitating him because of baptism. In the formula of redemption given by St. Ignatius that we considered at the very beginning, another sentence follows concerned with baptism. Ignatius says: “He was born and baptized, that by his Passion he might purify the water.”[24] Baptism is integral to participating in the economy of God’s love. As St. Clement says, “Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we becomes sons....” Referring specifically to St. Clement, St. Josemaría draws on this pattern twice to explain his own injunction to engage in continual prayer. He asks, “Isn’t it true that you have seen the need to become a soul of prayer, to reach an intimacy with God that leads to divinization?” (PB, 17), and he quotes St. Clement on imitation, “A man becomes God because he loves whatever God loves.” Quoting St. Clement in another place, St. Josemaría invokes what I have called the atmosphere of God’s philanthròpia. Clement says we are “to praise and honor the Word whom we know to be savior and king; and, through him, the Father, not on special days as some people do, but continually, right through all our life and in every kind of way” (PB, 116). As St. Josemaría understands this passage, continual prayer incorporates everything a person does into his imitation of or instruction by Christ, so that the person lives continually in God’s presence. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, Escrivá speaks of Christ’s establishment of the “new covenant.” He says, “Jesus dissolves the old economy of the law and reveals to us that he
himself will be the content of our prayer and life.” (PB, 152). Here, 
philanthrôpia and the theme of imitation of Christ become indistinguishable.[25]

The “logic of God” of which St. Josemaría speaks, the way in which ordinary things have supernatural value, follows from the manner of our redemption. God respected the naturalness of human life and established a regime of mercy so beyond expectation as to allow human beings to share in His life. Oikonomia, the plan of redemption, is thus both the ordering of a road or path and the logic of a meaningful proposition. The road is the route to the Father through the Son. The meaningful proposition is the sense or internal coherence of God’s redemption of mankind by means of our own nature.

Ordinary life and interior life

Returning to the quote with which we began—to be divinized, we must accept the ordinariness of our lives and sanctify their apparent worthlessness—we notice how St. Josemaría continues: “Thus did Mary live” (PB, 172). Escrivá says that, in the “school of intimacy with Christ,” Mary is the best teacher (PB, 174). This is because of her mastery of the divine economy. That mastery consists in her “supernatural vision” of the ordinary. He makes this point explicitly: “Behold the mystery of the divine economy. Our Lady, a full participant in the work of our salvation, follows in the footsteps of her Son…” (176). He then presents a catalogue of events in her life with Christ, not unlike the catalogue given by Gregory of Nyssa: the poverty of Bethlehem, an everyday life in Nazareth, the manifestation at Cana, the passion and cross. In another homily, St. Josemaría specifically enjoins us to run through the catalogue of Mary’s life. He said, “One of the Fathers of the early Church said that we should try to keep in our minds and in our memories a clear summary of the life of the Mother of God” (FG, 279). He recommends the same thoughtful recapitulation of the life of Jesus with Mary and Joseph (FG, 281).

It should be clear by now that the list of events in any individual’s life is, by extension, one meaning of oikonomia, since these are the events, possessed of their own order and internal coherence, in which God’s providential plan is worked out. Thus, from the themes of oikonomia and
**philanthrôpia**, in the Greek Fathers, flows quite directly St. Josemaría’s conclusion about what Mary understands best: “God is interested in everything we do, because Christ wishes to become incarnate in our things, to vivify from within even our most insignificant actions. This thought is a clear, objective, supernatural reality” (PB, 174). The supernatural reality to which St. Josemaría refers is the philanthropic economy delineated by the Fathers, accessible to the baptized through the divine plot hidden in the details of their own lives. Mary’s life demonstrates how any believer’s attention to the details of ordinary life is important for his or her salvation. To this extent, Mary’s life models the lay mentality.

That Mary understands the supernatural reality of the ordinary does not become, for St. Josemaría, the basis either of a claim for women’s spiritual superiority or for women’s specialized role in Christian life. Rather, it makes her the model for interior life for all, male and female. The formulation of St. Ignatius makes it clear: Jesus was born from Mary. In the terms of the Fathers, she is *Theotokos*, the one who bore God as a mother. This means that all the ordinary details of her motherly care were acted out in a dimension of heightened significance, her relationship with and love for God. St. Josemaría writes about the Virgin’s example, “If interior life doesn’t involve personal encounter with God, its doesn’t exist...” (PB, 174). Mary’s own personal encounter had the characteristics of femininity—receptivity, motherhood, nurturing, prompting and encouraging, ultimately suffering at the fate of her Child. Yet, what St. Josemaría highlights is the possibility for divinization belonging to her in an original way. The theme of *philanthrôpia* animates his references to Mary’s ordinary life. He describes her as “the object of God’s pleasure (*objeto de las complacencias de Dios*)” (PB, 172) and a “loving target for the delights of the Trinity (*el centro amoroso en el que convergen las complacencias de la Trinidad*)”(PB, 171). He says that although her being raised to such heights is a “divine secret,” we ourselves understand it better than some other truths of the faith (PB, 171). We understand it because it is our own human nature that is targeted. It is not just that Escrivá means for Mary’s example to be universal. Mary brings to reality, personifies, God’s overcoming the distance between Himself and every human being. St. Josemaría’s evocation of God’s love for Mary highlights the preservation of human nature in redemption. We should note that this preservation of
human nature entails a remarkable characteristic of God’s redemptive scheme: the equality of the sexes before God without androgeny—without, that is, the extinguishing of differences between men and women. This is an important aspect of the Incarnation that we would not have been able to design ourselves. By being a woman and mother, Mary brought human nature near to God. For this reason, the feminine aspects of her life continue to be important for spirituality and liturgy.

Let us pause to consider more precisely what St. Josemaría drew from the Church Fathers concerning Mary and woman in the scheme of redemption. A contrast may be helpful. A historian of early Christianity has noted that holy women, in the documents and literature of the early Church, were not considered types of Christ to the same extent as holy men. Christ was not “made accessible” through women, and consequently women are not miracle-workers, healers, and peace-makers as were holy men.[26] This understanding of holy women is perhaps paralleled in the Church Fathers’ understanding of Mary. She is not, at this period of time, conceived as a co-redeemer. Rather, she is an absolutely essential participant in redemption, her assent a key ingredient in the recipe.[27] Mary’s role as intercessor, on the other hand, does begin to be part of Christian spirituality during this period of time.[28] This role is fully consistent with her having reduced the distance between divine and human. Mary as co-redeemer and also as offering a Christ-like example of suffering are, however, important aspects of Escrivá’s understanding of Mary. [29] These parts of his thought on Mary do not come from the Church Fathers, then. What St. Josemaría specifically draws from the Fathers is the idea that redemption was materialized in her. Because of her free choice, the Incarnation made the immaterial real in a way accessible to humans.

The palpable reality of the Spirit, divinization, is one of the most notable features of the life of the first Christians. It is a hallmark also of Escrivá’s theology and spirituality. For him, it continues to be the case that Mary makes divinization possible at all. She is the guide to materializing piety and the exemplar of the lay mentality, because divinization takes place precisely in the catalogue of events typical of any life. God’s economy is central to this conception of Mary, because the meaning of a person’s deeds resides in the syntax or plan of the situation, the redemptive scheme for
that particular life. The immaterial—Christ’s presence or our salvation—is made real through the symbolic value of deeds performed. To put the matter vividly, the things we do are counters that calculate. They are parts of a strategy that is not our own but is for our own redemption. By the things we do, say, and think, we enter the atmosphere of the philanthropic economy or reject it.

Mary and lay mentality

Let me draw some implications for lay mentality in general and for lay mentality in women from this account of Mary and divine economy. The perspective on Mary from the standpoint of oikonomia shows the reason why Mary is the model for contemplation—because of her working out of the possibility of redemption in the natural details of her own life. Her contemplative example does not connote withdrawal from the world or quietude but rather community with Christ in daily activity. The first lesson she has to offer, St. Josemaría says, is how to be a contemplative in the world: “And thus you have a formula to become contemplatives in the middle of the world, amid the noises of the street, at all times and in all places” (PB, 174). Mary’s example is the formula. St. Josemaría then interprets the scripture, “... and Mary kept all these words in her heart (Luke 2:51),” as referring to Mary’s “supernatural vision,” her keeping the attitude of faith (PB, 174). Thus, by Mary’s example, we understand that contemplation is not a closet or cloister but a dimension of reality, the dimension in which any person experiences God’s love and openness.

Mary models the lay mentality, then, in two important ways. She lives an ordinary life in the world, the details of which all contribute to God’s plan.[30] And she maintains a supernatural vision of her life, engaged in constant conversation with God. This leads to an interesting point concerning the relation of the lay mentality and women’s celibacy. Sociologically, the motivation for celibacy, lay or religious, is to be free to devote oneself to the service of the Lord and his people. Spiritually, it is total giving of the self directly to God and not by the means of another person. An important feature of celibacy in religious orders, however, has been that the celibate signifies for the faithful the state of perfection that Christ brought to earth. He or she signifies, as the end to be achieved, the new human nature still being worked out in redemption. In this
connection, the religious celibate works within a Christian community directed toward God’s service. For the layperson, being a sign to others is not the reason for celibacy. Like Mary, the lay woman who is celibate lives a private life, and she pursues a secular career. Her co-workers may not be aware of her state of life. St. Josemaría always says that the lay person chooses celibacy for the love of God and for the sake of the kingdom.[31] This can be explicated in terms of a statement of St. Irenaeus about the new economy—that one virgin (Mary) had to reverse the disobedience of another (Eve). The point is that the work of redemption has actually to be done by God, and this is accomplished in individual lives. The lay celibate vocation testifies especially to this fact.

That redemption is worked out in ordinary deeds and personal histories is a point made forcefully in a response by St. Josemaría to a journalist’s question concerning “the role of women in the life of the Church.” He says, in effect, that the question runs the risk of assuming the standpoint of clericalism, understanding the Church as what is proper to the clergy or Church hierarchy. His answer continues with particular intensity, not denigrating the greater participation of women in positions of responsibility but rather developing the meaning of Church in the world. The laity must resist clericalization, he says, “and carry on being secular and ordinary, that is people who live in the world and take part in the affairs and interests of the world.”[32] He continues:

It is very moving to think of so many Christian men and women who, perhaps without any specific resolve, are living simple, ordinary lives and trying to make them a living embodiment of the Will of God. There is an urgent need in the Church to make these people conscious of the sublime value of their lives, to reveal to them that what they are doing, unimportant though it appears, has an eternal value, to urge them, to teach them to listen more attentively to the voice of God who speaks to them through everyday events and situations.[33]

He then characterizes all he has said in terms of Mary’s fiat, ‘be it done unto me according to your word.’ He says that on these words “depends the faithfulness to one’s personal vocation—which is always unique and non-transferable in each case....”[34] This answer illustrates very well how integral to Escrivá’s whole point of view is his thought about women.
Mary’s role in the divine economy is central to the significance of the secular life of the Christian, and women like men are called to lay vocation. Indeed, women’s calling brings home most forcefully the meaning of lay mentality, because they are so close to Mary in nature and also because they occupy a strategic position in modern life. His answer in this case also illustrates a reversal or change of key that often characterizes his answers to questions arising from contemporary concerns. He interprets the question in relation to what he takes to be a more fundamental and important concern.

Another such reversal appears in his discussion of the importance of domestic work, most of which is done by women. The emphasis on domestic work has been taken by some to show that St. Josemaría thought women’s apostolic life should be limited to the traditional roles of home and kitchen. This criticism is belied by his insistence upon the same formation and education for men and women in Opus Dei, by his encouraging women to take advanced degrees in theology, and by his insistence on each person choosing her path in life with complete freedom. He says explicitly that there need not be “any conflict between one’s family and social life,” and further that there is no reason to exclude women from “any worthwhile employment available in the society in which she lives.”[35]

But the role of Mary in the divine economy and her consequent status as exemplar of the lay mentality show why domestic labor is so important. It is the work that Mary did in welcoming Christ and preparing his ministry. In domestic labor—ordering and maintaining a home, cleaning, preparing meals, and ministering to the weary, sick or discouraged—the worker serves others, who are Christ, in an immediate and vital way. Setting up schools for the professionalization of this work testifies to its natural integrity and its high value in the order of grace. More fundamentally, professionalization signifies the importance of order in rendering domestic activities sanctified. Order means not business-like efficiency but serenity, confidence, and attentive love. It means oikonomia in its connotation of a climate or condition in which persons can flourish in accordance with the plan of redemption. Those who question the commitment to domestic labor reveal their own prejudice against it, which St. Josemaría did not share. He said, “We must not forget that there are people who have wanted to present this work as something humiliating, but it is not.”[36]
Only the conditions in which it has been done have sometimes been humiliating. Another reason for professionalization of this labor is to regularize the obligations of others, employers and those served, toward the domestic worker.[37] Here again, Escrivá’s answer to a doubt recasts the issue in more fundamental terms.

**Woman in the divine economy**

We have seen how St. Josemaría’s thought on the materialization of redemption in Mary lays the foundation for his thinking about women. Let me summarize briefly how Mary’s being a woman, and therefore how each woman’s gender, is important in God’s economy. We learn from the Church Fathers that Mary’s humanity, even her body, is indispensable to the Divine Physician’s plan. This is because human life was meant by God to be sanctified and redeemed within nature. Because of the way God redeemed humankind, the natural forms of life are significant for salvation. In the way that this was true first for Mary, it remains true for every woman. God needed Mary not just to bear Christ but to assist the redemption that achieved the most for human nature. Thus, as it comes to us from Mary, the woman’s task is to reduce the distance between divine and human, to promote intimacy between God and creatures. The woman’s directedness toward individual persons and her attention to detail are natural characteristics. But in the divine economy, her attention to the ordinary does not amount simply to being immersed in a wealth of ephemeral detail. Understanding Mary’s role in the divine economy, we see that woman in fact makes individual life significant; she connects it to the divine plan, rendering history, whether personal or collective, meaningful.

The woman does not raise the individual toward God on her own initiative, however. Her promoting intimacy with God is possible because of her role in the Incarnation economy. The Incarnation is the ultimate relation of her womanhood, the context from which her actions are inseparable. Another point can be made about the Incarnation context. To accomplish His redemption, God had to rely on a free human being, Mary. She is thus emblematic of human freedom. It is hard to imagine another time in history than the present when women have shared to a greater extent in Mary’s freedom. In our own age, it matters very much how women exercise personal freedom in just those areas of life where Mary
excelled. The importance of a woman’s freedom is evident to us in the areas of sexual and reproductive ethics, in the day-to-day care of children, and in the preservation of a humane culture. These are domains that God entrusted to women at the Incarnation and for which women are specially responsible.

St. Josemaría said that the Feast of the Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin was his favorite Marian feast. In a homily on this day, he addresses the topic with which this paper began, the reason for the Incarnation. He says that God could have chosen many ways of redeeming us but chose the one that makes indisputable our own salvation and glorification. Thus he emphasizes that the Incarnation raises us up. Then he quotes St. Basil’s contrast of Adam and Christ and the Virgin’s role in making Christ flesh (FG, 276). This is a final example of one of my central themes—that the connection of Escrivá’s thought to the Church Fathers is specific and precise. It is a connection he made intentionally and by an unerring Christian sensibility. The investigation of oikonomia has shown that the Church Fathers believed salvation makes sense in worldly, human terms. This reasoning of the Fathers is a source for St. Josemaría’s vivid insights concerning the materialization of piety. The theological grounding for his lay spirituality is, in part, his understanding of Mary derived from the Fathers.

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[2] “The Blessed Virgin, Cause of Our Joy,” Christ is Passing By (Princeton: Scepter), 172. References to the homilies are by marginal numbers given in the text, not by page numbers of the edition consulted. For references within the text, PB = Christ is Passing By and FG = Friends of God.

[3] In this paper, I will draw in particular on the Greek Fathers of Asia Minor and Alexandria: Ignatius of Antioch (1st century), Irenaeus (2nd) who traveled to Lyons from Asia Minor, Clement of Alexandria (2nd-3rd), and the Cappadocian brothers Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa (3rd). I draw on ideas from different writers because this was the manner of St. Josemaría’s own recourse to the Fathers in the expression of his theology.
in his homilies. Because of the doctrinal centrality of oikonomia, there is a certain theological simplicity to its expression in different thinkers, and consistency in the development of the idea in the Greek writers. Among the Latin Fathers, Tertullian is notable for his development of the doctrine in relation to the Trinity. He uses the terms oeconomia, dispensatio, and dispositio. See his Against Praxeas, ch. 2 and 3.

[4] Development of the theological significance of women's differences from men is an important topic. For a treatment of the range of feminist thought on this question and a Thomistic development of the epistemology of women's ways of knowing, see Pia Francesca de Solenni, A Hermeneutic of Aquinas's Mens Through a Sexually Differentiated Epistemology (Rome: Apollinare Studi, 2000).

[5] Hippolytus (3rd century) uses the word ‘persons’ (prosôpa) for the Father and Son, describing the Holy Spirit as a “third economy” (Contra Noetum XIV [Migne, PG, vol. 10, 820-21]).

[6] Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd ed.), 236. An extension of this basic meaning of economy is doctrinal leniency or ecclesiastical dispensation. This is because Christian oikonomia has to do with God giving assistance in overcoming human limitation. On this topic, see the articles in Patristic and Byzantine Review 6, no. 1 (1987), in particular “Oikonomia’ as Doctrinal Leniency and Intercommunion in the Church Fathers,” by Archbishop Methodios of Thyateira and Great Britain, pp. 15-19.

[7] See Carlo Natali, “Oikonomia in Hellenistic Political Thought,” in Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy, ed. André Laks and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 97-102. In political writing after Aristotle, the term had a wide connotation of management of political affairs, division of wealth, or the apportionment of any complex situation. Oikonomia was conceived as a craft, activity that involved design or planning, but it also came to have ethical connotations concerned with what constitutes wise use of resources or what should be sought at all as the end of practical action.

Irenaeus uses the term *oikonomia* (in Latin versions, *dispositio*) very frequently in connection with his notion of Christ’s recapitulation or summing up of human history. The word for recapitulation (*anakephalaiôsis*) is allied with *oikonomia* in Greek rhetoric. See also Adhémar d’Alèmar, “Le Mot oikonomia dans la langue théologique de Saint Irénée,” *Revue des études grecques* 32 (1919): 1-9.

[9] *Oikonomia* is also used to refer to God’s plan at I Timothy 1:4. Other uses of the word in the New Testament connote household management (Luke 16:2-4) or individual stewardship (I Corinthians 9:17, Ephesians 3:2, Colossians 1:25).


[16] “Sic autem et Evae inobedientiae nodus solutionem accepit per obedientiam Mariae. Quod enim alligavit virgo Eva per Incredulitatem, hoc virgo Maria solvit per fidem.” *Adversus haereses* 3, ch.22 (Migne, PG 7, 959D-60A).

[17] Irenaeus 3.22 (Grant, p. 140).


[19] The Church understands the seven sacraments in relation to the stages of natural life. On this topic, see *Catechism*, 1115, 1210-12, 1420-21.
See, for instance, Gregory, *Adversus Apollinarem* (Migne PG 45), 1180B-C.

*Friends of God* (Princeton: Scepter), 221; Passing By, 66.


Irenaeus also refers to this passage from Psalms (82:6-7), including the last part of it, “... You are all gods and sons of the Most High, but you die like men.” With Clement, Irenaeus understands the verse as describing the divinization that comes with the new regime of the Incarnation. Those who die have not accepted the gift of adoption (*Adversus haereses* 3.19 [Grant, p. 137]).

To the Ephesians XVIII. Purifying the waters may be a reference to the Lord’s own baptism instituting the sacrament of baptism. Compare *Catechism*, 1223-24.


For a fuller picture of the understanding of Mary in the early Church, see Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1994), ch. 2. The Motherhood of God is the central truth about Mary in the first centuries of the Church. There are discussions of her perpetual virginity and virginity in partu; the Immaculate Conception is not part of the picture. See also the collection of texts in Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), ch. 1-9.

The Marian prayer, *Sub tuum praesidium*, dates from the 3rd century. It was discovered in a papyrus from Egypt (Gambero [note 22], p. 79). In theological writings, Irenaeus describes Mary as *advocata* of Eve,
but this seems to pertain, not to intercession, but to her ability to reverse sin by her obedience (Gambero, p. 56).

[29] As an example, see his homily, “Mother of God and Our Mother,” where themes from the Church Fathers are combined with Mary as Co-Redemptrix (FG, 287), as suffering like Christ (288), and as teacher (284).

[30] It is perhaps appropriate to clarify the meaning of ‘ordinary.’ The proper contrast for ‘ordinary’ is not ‘extraordinary’ but ‘public or concerned with public affairs.’ Ordinariness carries a connotation of concern with the things belonging to the personal history of oneself and others. The Greek word for ‘living a private life’ was *idiōteuō* from the root *idio-* , meaning what is proper to oneself. In accordance with this meaning, the private life is not an exclusive preserve of individuality or personal preference but simply the realm of concern with the things belonging to one’s own situation, history, or station in life. No one is completely a public person, and so everyone has an ordinary life in the sense meant here. Certainly, Mary’s life was extraordinary, though its meaning was worked out in personal history.


[34] “Women,” *Conversations*, 112.


[38] St. Josemaría highlights the contributions women can make to civic life in these areas in “Women,” *Conversations*, 90.