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.
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EDITORIAL
The Splendor of Charity

On October 6, 2002, Pope John Paul II included Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer in the roll of the saints. From that day on, we began to hear a widespread comment: St. Josemaría now no longer belongs just to Opus Dei, but to the whole Church. His example, his teachings, his intercession are open more than ever to all Catholics and to all men and women of good will, wherever they may be.

On a human plane, children are a portrait of their parents. On the supernatural plane, it also happens that many people discover St. Josemaría through contact with his children. Relatives, friends and colleagues understand the message of sanctifying work when the faithful of Opus Dei are able to express it in deeds of charity, eloquent in the highest degree. Intellectual discovery is often preceded by a personal encounter; many people learn to love St. Josemaría and become interested in the profundity of his words when they see the affection of his children.

Interest in the Work arises at times from apparently negative episodes. Falsehoods that circulate periodically are not something new, but are part of life for individuals and institutions. Myths also accompany the Church, which has been a sign of contradiction from its very beginning. St. Josemaría used a very expressive metaphor in this regard: “They have treated the Work,” he said in a get-together, “like a sack of wheat. It’s been beaten and battered about. But the seeds are so small that they haven’t broken. On the contrary, the seeds have scattered to the four winds, and landed wherever hearts hungry for the Truth were present.”[1] Therefore, we aren’t surprised by circumstances that are apparently negative, nor do they rob us of our peace. Rather they remind us of that point in Furrow: “All the things that are now worrying you can be put into a smile which shows your love of God.”[2] Problems in life are never lacking; the important thing is that our reaction be supernatural, Christian, filled with charity. It is our faith that makes this possible, with the certainty of divine filiation, and therefore assured that victory is already ours. “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”[3]

Falsehoods do not mar the image of the Church. Rather they help people to grasp its beauty better, by contrast. Something similar happens
with the Work. Its image is that given by the Prelature’s faithful. The beauty of Opus Dei is expressed in the charity with which we try to treat those around us, also when facing opposition or when misunderstandings need to be cleared up. Explaining the truth with charity is the best way to disarm falsehood. As St. Paul taught, “noli vinci a malo, sed vince in bono malum”: do not be overcome by evil, but rather overcome evil with good. Only the light of charity can illumine the darkness of rancor.

Charity is joined to the positive work of communicating the truth, placing all our talents at the service of spreading good doctrine. The mission of Catholics includes working to set forth good arguments: accompanying our colleagues and friends towards the truth, so that they discover it for themselves and adhere to it freely. As Benedict XVI pointed out in his first encyclical: in the task of “bringing about the most just society possible,” the Church wishes to contribute “through rational argument,” in addition to trying “to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper...The promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.”

The work of opening minds and moving wills, in a context of freedom, requires of Catholics an effort to be “good explainers,” to use an expression St. Josemaría liked, striving to be at the level of the frequently complex problems that need to be clarified. Showing that the faith is reasonable, that morality leads to happiness, that Christ has come to free us, are some of the convictions that our world urgently needs, with so many people longing for these discoveries deep in their hearts.

For Catholics, the best argument is one’s own life. The Church is convincing when it shows forth the marvels that grace has worked throughout its history. Therefore, the best way to respond to falsehoods about the Church and the Prelature of Opus Dei is to let the reality be seen, with modesty and simplicity. With personal and collective humility, seeking only the glory of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does
what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.[6] In various places in the Gospel, our Lord refers to his disciples as children of the light, who have no fear of the truth, and who know that God is the author of everything good.

Living charity is the best way of informing people about the Church and about Opus Dei: loving is a way of knowing and of letting oneself be known. This is an eminently practical and positive work, proper to people “with big hearts and arms wide open, ready to drown evil in an abundance of good, because Opus Dei is not ‘antianything.’ It is always affirmation, youth, optimism and victory, and charity towards everyone.”[7]

HOLY SEE

• The Roman Pontiff
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today’s liturgy our gaze continues to be turned to the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, while with particular emphasis we contemplate the Motherhood of the Virgin Mary.

In the Pauline passage we have heard (cf. Gal 4: 4), the Apostle very discreetly points to the One through whom the Son of God enters the world: Mary of Nazareth, Mother of God, Theotokos.

At the beginning of a new year, we are invited, as it were, to attend her school, the school of the faithful disciple of the Lord, in order to learn from her to accept in faith and prayer the salvation God desires to pour out upon those who trust in his merciful love.

Salvation is a gift of God; in the first reading, it was presented as a blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you!... The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!” (Num 6: 24, 26).

This is the blessing that priests used to invoke upon the people at the end of the great liturgical feasts, particularly the feast of the New Year. We are in the presence of a text packed with meaning, punctuated by the Name of the Lord which is repeated at the beginning of every verse. This text is not limited to the mere enunciation of principles but strives to realize what it says.

Indeed, as is widely known, in Semitic thought the blessing of the Lord produces well-being and salvation through its own power, just as cursing procures disgrace and ruin. The effectiveness of blessing is later more specifically brought about by God, who protects us (v. 24), favors us (v. 25) and gives us peace, which is to say in other words, he offers us an abundance of happiness.
By having us listen once again to this ancient blessing at the beginning of a new solar year, the liturgy, as it were, encourages us in turn to invoke the Lord’s blessing upon the New Year that is just beginning, so that it may be a year of prosperity and peace for us all. It is precisely this wish that I would like to address to the distinguished Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See who are taking part in today’s liturgical celebration.

I greet Cardinal Angelo Sodano, my Secretary of State. With him, I greet Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino and all the members of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. I am particularly grateful to them for their commitment to disseminating the annual Message for the World Day of Peace, addressed to Christians and to all men and women of good will.

I also offer a cordial greeting to the many choirboys who with their singing add to the solemnity of this Holy Mass, during which we ask God for the gift of peace for the whole world.

By choosing the theme “In truth, peace” as the Message for the World Day of Peace, I wanted to express the conviction that “whenever men and women are enlightened by the splendor of truth, they naturally set out on the path of peace” (no. 3). How can we not see in this an effective and appropriate realization of the Gospel just proclaimed, in which we contemplated the scene of the shepherds on their way to Bethlehem to adore the Child? (cf. Lk 2: 16).

Are not those shepherds, whom the Evangelist Luke describes to us in their poverty and simplicity, obedient to the Angel’s order and docile to God’s will, perhaps the image most easily accessible to each one of us of the person who allows himself to be enlightened by the truth and is thereby enabled to build a world of peace?

Peace! This great, heartfelt aspiration of every man and every woman is built day after day by the contribution of all and by treasuring the wonderful heritage passed down to us by the Second Vatican Council with the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, which says, among other things, that humanity will not succeed in “the establishment of a truly human
world for all men over the entire earth, unless everyone devotes himself to the cause of true peace with renewed vigor” (no. 77).

The time in history when the Constitution Gaudium et Spes was promulgated, December 7, 1965, was not very different from our time. Then, as unfortunately also in our day and age, tensions of various kinds were looming on the world horizon. In the face of the lasting situations of injustice and violence that continue to oppress various parts of the earth, in the face of those that are emerging as new and more insidious threats to peace - terrorism, nihilism and fanatical fundamentalism - it is becoming more necessary than ever to work together for peace!

A “start” of courage and trust in God and man is necessary if we are to choose the path of peace. And it must be on the part of all: individuals and peoples, international organizations and world powers.

In the Message for today’s event, I wanted in particular to call the United Nations Organization to a renewed awareness of its responsibilities in encouraging the values of justice, solidarity and peace in a world that is ever more marked by the vast phenomenon of globalization.

If peace is the aspiration of every person of good will, for Christ’s disciples it is a permanent mandate that involves all; it is a demanding mission that impels them to announce and witness to “the Gospel of Peace,” proclaiming that recognition of God’s full truth is an indispensable pre-condition for the consolidation of the truth of peace.

May this awareness continue to grow so that every Christian community becomes the “leaven” of a humanity renewed by love.

“And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2: 19).

The first day of the year is placed under the sign of a woman, Mary. The Evangelist Luke describes her as the silent Virgin who listens constantly to the eternal Word, who lives in the Word of God. Mary treasures in her heart the words that come from God and, piecing them together as in a mosaic, learns to understand them.

Let us too, at her school, learn to become attentive and docile disciples of the Lord. With her motherly help, let us commit ourselves to working
enthusiastically in the “workshop” of peace, following Christ, the Prince of Peace.

After the example of the Blessed Virgin, may we let ourselves be guided always and only by Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever! (Heb 13: 8). Amen.

Encyclical Deus Caritas Est (January 1, 2006)

INTRODUCTION

1. “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us”.

We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should... have eternal life” (3:16). In acknowledging the centrality of love, Christian faith has retained the core of Israel's faith, while at the same time giving it new depth and breadth. The pious Jew prayed daily the words of the Book of Deuteronomy which expressed the heart of his existence: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might” (6:4-5). Jesus united into a single precept this commandment of love for God and the commandment of love for neighbor found in the Book of Leviticus: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18; cf. Mk 12:29-31). Since God
has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere “command”; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.

In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant. For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others. That, in essence, is what the two main parts of this Letter are about, and they are profoundly interconnected. The first part is more speculative, since I wanted here—at the beginning of my Pontificate—to clarify some essential facts concerning the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man, together with the intrinsic link between that Love and the reality of human love. The second part is more concrete, since it treats the ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbor. The argument has vast implications, but a lengthy treatment would go beyond the scope of the present Encyclical. I wish to emphasize some basic elements, so as to call forth in the world renewed energy and commitment in the human response to God's love.

PART I
THE UNITY OF LOVE
IN CREATION
AND IN SALVATION HISTORY

A problem of language

2. God's love for us is fundamental for our lives, and it raises important questions about who God is and who we are. In considering this, we immediately find ourselves hampered by a problem of language. Today, the term “love” has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings. Even though this Encyclical will deal primarily with the understanding and practice of love in sacred Scripture and in the Church’s Tradition, we cannot simply prescind from the meaning of the word in the different cultures and in present-day usage.

Let us first of all bring to mind the vast semantic range of the word “love”: we speak of love of country, love of one's profession, love between
friends, love of work, love between parents and children, love between family members, love of neighbor and love of God. Amid this multiplicity of meanings, however, one in particular stands out: love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love; all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison. So we need to ask: are all these forms of love basically one, so that love, in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same word to designate totally different realities?

“Eros” and “Agape” — difference and unity

3. That love between man and woman which is neither planned nor willed, but somehow imposes itself upon human beings, was called eros by the ancient Greeks. Let us note straight away that the Greek Old Testament uses the word eros only twice, while the New Testament does not use it at all: of the three Greek words for love, eros, philia (the love of friendship) and agape, New Testament writers prefer the last, which occurs rather infrequently in Greek usage. As for the term philia, the love of friendship, it is used with added depth of meaning in Saint John's Gospel in order to express the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The tendency to avoid the word eros, together with the new vision of love expressed through the word agape, clearly point to something new and distinct about the Christian understanding of love. In the critique of Christianity which began with the Enlightenment and grew progressively more radical, this new element was seen as something thoroughly negative. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Christianity had poisoned eros, which for its part, while not completely succumbing, gradually degenerated into vice.[1] Here the German philosopher was expressing a widely-held perception: doesn't the Church, with all her commandments and prohibitions, turn to bitterness the most precious thing in life? Doesn't she blow the whistle just when the joy which is the Creator's gift offers us a happiness which is itself a certain foretaste of the Divine?

4. But is this the case? Did Christianity really destroy eros? Let us take a look at the pre-Christian world. The Greeks—not unlike other cultures—considered eros principally as a kind of intoxication, the
overpowering of reason by a “divine madness” which tears man away from his finite existence and enables him, in the very process of being overwhelmed by divine power, to experience supreme happiness. All other powers in heaven and on earth thus appear secondary: “Omnia vincit amor” says Virgil in the *Bucolics*—love conquers all—and he adds: “et nos cedamus amori” —let us, too, yield to love.[2] In the religions, this attitude found expression in fertility cults, part of which was the “sacred” prostitution which flourished in many temples. *Eros* was thus celebrated as divine power, as fellowship with the Divine.

The Old Testament firmly opposed this form of religion, which represents a powerful temptation against monotheistic faith, combating it as a perversion of religiosity. But it in no way rejected *eros* as such; rather, it declared war on a warped and destructive form of it, because this counterfeit divinization of *eros* actually strips it of its dignity and dehumanizes it. Indeed, the prostitutes in the temple, who had to bestow this divine intoxication, were not treated as human beings and persons, but simply used as a means of arousing “divine madness”: far from being goddesses, they were human persons being exploited. An intoxicated and undisciplined *eros*, then, is not an ascent in “ecstasy” towards the Divine, but a fall, a degradation of man. Evidently, *eros* needs to be disciplined and purified if it is to provide not just fleeting pleasure, but a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns.

5. Two things emerge clearly from this rapid overview of the concept of *eros* past and present. First, there is a certain relationship between love and the Divine: love promises infinity, eternity—a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence. Yet we have also seen that the way to attain this goal is not simply by submitting to instinct. Purification and growth in maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation. Far from rejecting or “poisoning” *eros*, they heal it and restore its true grandeur.

This is due first and foremost to the fact that man is a being made up of body and soul. Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of *eros* can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved. Should he aspire to be pure spirit and to
reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness. The epicure Gassendi used to offer Descartes the humorous greeting: “O Soul!” And Descartes would reply: “O Flesh!”.[3] Yet it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love —*eros*—able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur.

Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. *Eros*, reduced to pure “sex”, has become a commodity, a mere “thing” to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great “yes” to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness. Christian faith, on the other hand, has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter compenetrate, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True, *eros* tends to rise “in ecstasy” towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.

6. Concretely, what does this path of ascent and purification entail? How might love be experienced so that it can fully realize its human and divine promise? Here we can find a first, important indication in the *Song of Songs*, an Old Testament book well known to the mystics. According to the interpretation generally held today, the poems contained in this book were originally love-songs, perhaps intended for a Jewish wedding feast and meant to exalt conjugal love. In this context it is highly instructive to
note that in the course of the book two different Hebrew words are used to indicate “love”. First there is the word *dodim*, a plural form suggesting a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching. This comes to be replaced by the word *ahabà*, which the Greek version of the Old Testament translates with the similar-sounding *agape*, which, as we have seen, becomes the typical expression for the biblical notion of love. By contrast with an indeterminate, “searching” love, this word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.

It is part of love's growth towards higher levels and inward purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being “for ever”. Love embraces the whole of existence in each of its dimensions, including the dimension of time. It could hardly be otherwise, since its promise looks towards its definitive goal: love looks to the eternal. Love is indeed “ecstasy”, not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it” (*Lk* 17:33), as Jesus says throughout the Gospels (cf. *Mt* 10:39; 16:25; *Mk* 8:35; *Lk* 9:24; *Jn* 12:25). In these words, Jesus portrays his own path, which leads through the Cross to the Resurrection: the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and in this way bears much fruit. Starting from the depths of his own sacrifice and of the love that reaches fulfillment therein, he also portrays in these words the essence of love and indeed of human life itself.

7. By their own inner logic, these initial, somewhat philosophical reflections on the essence of love have now brought us to the threshold of biblical faith. We began by asking whether the different, or even opposed, meanings of the word “love” point to some profound underlying unity, or whether on the contrary they must remain unconnected, one alongside the
other. More significantly, though, we questioned whether the message of love proclaimed to us by the Bible and the Church's Tradition has some points of contact with the common human experience of love, or whether it is opposed to that experience. This in turn led us to consider two fundamental words: *eros*, as a term to indicate “worldly” love and *agape*, referring to love grounded in and shaped by faith. The two notions are often contrasted as “ascending” love and “descending” love. There are other, similar classifications, such as the distinction between possessive love and oblative love (*amor concupiscentiae* — *amor benevolentiae*), to which is sometimes also added love that seeks its own advantage.

In philosophical and theological debate, these distinctions have often been radicalized to the point of establishing a clear antithesis between them: descending, oblative love—*agape*—would be typically Christian, while on the other hand ascending, possessive or covetous love—*eros*—would be typical of non-Christian, and particularly Greek culture. Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life. Yet *eros* and *agape*—ascending love and descending love—can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to “be there for” the other. The element of *agape* thus enters into this love, for otherwise *eros* is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblative, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. *Jn* 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. *Jn* 19:34).
In the account of Jacob's ladder, the Fathers of the Church saw this inseparable connection between ascending and descending love, between *eros* which seeks God and *agape* which passes on the gift received, symbolized in various ways. In that biblical passage we read how the Patriarch Jacob saw in a dream, above the stone which was his pillow, a ladder reaching up to heaven, on which the angels of God were ascending and descending (cf. *Gen* 28:12; *Jn* 1:51). A particularly striking interpretation of this vision is presented by Pope Gregory the Great in his *Pastoral Rule*. He tells us that the good pastor must be rooted in contemplation. Only in this way will he be able to take upon himself the needs of others and make them his own: “per pietatis viscera in se infirmitatem caeterorum transferat”. Saint Gregory speaks in this context of Saint Paul, who was borne aloft to the most exalted mysteries of God, and hence, having descended once more, he was able to become all things to all men (cf. *2 Cor* 12:2-4; *1 Cor* 9:22). He also points to the example of Moses, who entered the tabernacle time and again, remaining in dialogue with God, so that when he emerged he could be at the service of his people. “Within [the tent] he is borne aloft through contemplation, while without he is completely engaged in helping those who suffer: intus in contemplationem rapitur, foris infirmantium negotiis urgetur.”

8. We have thus come to an initial, albeit still somewhat generic response to the two questions raised earlier. Fundamentally, “love” is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love. And we have also seen, synthetically, that biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man; it intervenes in his search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it. This newness of biblical faith is shown chiefly in two elements which deserve to be highlighted: the image of God and the image of man.

*The newness of biblical faith*

9. First, the world of the Bible presents us with a new image of God. In surrounding cultures, the image of God and of the gods ultimately
remained unclear and contradictory. In the development of biblical faith, however, the content of the prayer fundamental to Israel, the Shema, became increasingly clear and unequivocal: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Dt 6:4). There is only one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who is thus the God of all. Two facts are significant about this statement: all other gods are not God, and the universe in which we live has its source in God and was created by him. Certainly, the notion of creation is found elsewhere, yet only here does it become absolutely clear that it is not one god among many, but the one true God himself who is the source of all that exists; the whole world comes into existence by the power of his creative Word. Consequently, his creation is dear to him, for it was willed by him and “made” by him. The second important element now emerges: this God loves man. The divine power that Aristotle at the height of Greek philosophy sought to grasp through reflection, is indeed for every being an object of desire and of love —and as the object of love this divinity moves the world[6]—but in itself it lacks nothing and does not love: it is solely the object of love. The one God in whom Israel believes, on the other hand, loves with a personal love. His love, moreover, is an elective love: among all the nations he chooses Israel and loves her—but he does so precisely with a view to healing the whole human race. God loves, and his love may certainly be called eros, yet it is also totally agape.[7]

The Prophets, particularly Hosea and Ezekiel, described God's passion for his people using boldly erotic images. God's relationship with Israel is described using the metaphors of betrothal and marriage; idolatry is thus adultery and prostitution. Here we find a specific reference—as we have seen—to the fertility cults and their abuse of eros, but also a description of the relationship of fidelity between Israel and her God. The history of the love-relationship between God and Israel consists, at the deepest level, in the fact that he gives her the Torah, thereby opening Israel's eyes to man's true nature and showing her the path leading to true humanism. It consists in the fact that man, through a life of fidelity to the one God, comes to experience himself as loved by God, and discovers joy in truth and in righteousness—a joy in God which becomes his essential happiness: “Whom do I have in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you... for me it is good to be near God” (Ps 73 [72]:25, 28).
10. We have seen that God's *eros* for man is also totally *agape*. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but also because it is love which forgives. Hosea above all shows us that this *agape* dimension of God's love for man goes far beyond the aspect of gratuity. Israel has committed “adultery” and has broken the covenant; God should judge and repudiate her. It is precisely at this point that God is revealed to be God and not man: “How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel!... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst” (*Hos* 11:8-9). God's passionate love for his people—for humanity—is at the same time a forgiving love. It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice. Here Christians can see a dim prefigurement of the mystery of the Cross: so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love.

The philosophical dimension to be noted in this biblical vision, and its importance from the standpoint of the history of religions, lies in the fact that on the one hand we find ourselves before a strictly metaphysical image of God: God is the absolute and ultimate source of all being; but this universal principle of creation—the *Logos*, primordial reason—is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love. *Eros* is thus supremely ennobled, yet at the same time it is so purified as to become one with *agape*. We can thus see how the reception of the *Song of Songs* in the canon of sacred Scripture was soon explained by the idea that these love songs ultimately describe God's relation to man and man's relation to God. Thus the *Song of Songs* became, both in Christian and Jewish literature, a source of mystical knowledge and experience, an expression of the essence of biblical faith: that man can indeed enter into union with God—his primordial aspiration. But this union is no mere fusion, a sinking in the nameless ocean of the Divine; it is a unity which creates love, a unity in which both God and man remain themselves and yet become fully one. As Saint Paul says: “He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (*1 Cor* 6:17).
11. The first novelty of biblical faith consists, as we have seen, in its image of God. The second, essentially connected to this, is found in the image of man. The biblical account of creation speaks of the solitude of Adam, the first man, and God's decision to give him a helper. Of all other creatures, not one is capable of being the helper that man needs, even though he has assigned a name to all the wild beasts and birds and thus made them fully a part of his life. So God forms woman from the rib of man. Now Adam finds the helper that he needed: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). Here one might detect hints of ideas that are also found, for example, in the myth mentioned by Plato, according to which man was originally spherical, because he was complete in himself and self-sufficient. But as a punishment for pride, he was split in two by Zeus, so that now he longs for his other half, striving with all his being to possess it and thus regain his integrity. While the biblical narrative does not speak of punishment, the idea is certainly present that man is somehow incomplete, driven by nature to seek in another the part that can make him whole, the idea that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become “complete”. The biblical account thus concludes with a prophecy about Adam: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

Two aspects of this are important. First, eros is somehow rooted in man's very nature; Adam is a seeker, who “abandons his mother and father” in order to find woman; only together do the two represent complete humanity and become “one flesh”. The second aspect is equally important. From the standpoint of creation, eros directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfill its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between eros and marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature.

Jesus Christ — the incarnate love of God

12. Though up to now we have been speaking mainly of the Old
Testament, nevertheless the profound compenetration of the two Testaments as the one Scripture of the Christian faith has already become evident. The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism. In the Old Testament, the novelty of the Bible did not consist merely in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and in some sense unprecedented activity. This divine activity now takes on dramatic form when, in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the “stray sheep”, a suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.

13. Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna (cf. Jn 6:31-33). The ancient world had dimly perceived that man's real food—what truly nourishes him as man—is ultimately the Logos, eternal wisdom: this same Logos now truly becomes food for us—as love. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood. The sacramental “mysticism”, grounded in God's condescension towards us, operates at a radically different level and lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish.
14. Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental “mysticism” is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become “one body”, completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbor are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how agape also became a term for the Eucharist: there God’s own agape comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus’ teaching on love. The transition which he makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbor, and his grounding the whole life of faith on this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality—something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization. Faith, worship and ethos are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God’s agape. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. “Worship” itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely, as we shall have to consider in greater detail below, the “commandment” of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be “commanded” because it has first been given.

15. This principle is the starting-point for understanding the great parables of Jesus. The rich man (cf. Lk 16:19-31) begs from his place of torment that his brothers be informed about what happens to those who simply ignore the poor man in need. Jesus takes up this cry for help as a warning to help us return to the right path. The parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37) offers two particularly important clarifications. Until that time, the concept of “neighbor” was understood as referring
essentially to one's countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel; in other words, to the closely-knit community of a single country or people. This limit is now abolished. Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbor. The concept of “neighbor” is now universalized, yet it remains concrete. Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now. The Church has the duty to interpret ever anew this relationship between near and far with regard to the actual daily life of her members. Lastly, we should especially mention the great parable of the Last Judgement (cf. Mt 25:31-46), in which love becomes the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's worth or lack thereof. Jesus identifies himself with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt25:40). Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.

Love of God and love of neighbor

16. Having reflected on the nature of love and its meaning in biblical faith, we are left with two questions concerning our own attitude: can we love God without seeing him? And can love be commanded? Against the double commandment of love these questions raise a double objection. No one has ever seen God, so how could we love him? Moreover, love cannot be commanded; it is ultimately a feeling that is either there or not, nor can it be produced by the will. Scripture seems to reinforce the first objection when it states: “If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20). But this text hardly excludes the love of God as something impossible. On the contrary, the whole context of the passage quoted from the First Letter of John shows that such love is explicitly demanded. The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor is emphasized. One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbor or hate him altogether. Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean
that love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God.

17. True, no one has ever seen God as he is. And yet God is not totally invisible to us; he does not remain completely inaccessible. God loved us first, says the Letter of John quoted above (cf. 4:10), and this love of God has appeared in our midst. He has become visible in as much as he “has sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him” (1 Jn4:9). God has made himself visible: in Jesus we are able to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). Indeed, God is visible in a number of ways. In the love-story recounted by the Bible, he comes towards us, he seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of his heart on the Cross, to his appearances after the Resurrection and to the great deeds by which, through the activity of the Apostles, he guided the nascent Church along its path. Nor has the Lord been absent from subsequent Church history: he encounters us ever anew, in the men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist. In the Church's Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives. He has loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love. God does not demand of us a feeling which we ourselves are incapable of producing. He loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and since he has “loved us first”, love can also blossom as a response within us.

In the gradual unfolding of this encounter, it is clearly revealed that love is not merely a sentiment. Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be a marvelous first spark, but it is not the fullness of love. Earlier we spoke of the process of purification and maturation by which eros comes fully into its own, becomes love in the full meaning of the word. It is characteristic of mature love that it calls into play all man's potentialities; it engages the whole man, so to speak. Contact with the visible manifestations of God's love can awaken within us a feeling of joy born of the experience of being loved. But this encounter also engages our will and our intellect. Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the “yes” of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never
“finished” and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself. *Idem velle atque idem nolle*—to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing—was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. Ps 73 [72]:23-28).

18. Love of neighbor is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern. This I can offer them not only through the organizations intended for such purposes, accepting it perhaps as a political necessity. Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave. Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbor which the *First Letter of John* speaks of with such insistence. If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be “devout” and to perform my “religious duties”, then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely “proper”, but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. The saints—consider the example of Blessed
Teresa of Calcutta—constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbor from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others. Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a “commandment” imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is “divine” because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a “we” which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

PART II

CARITAS

THE PRACTICE OF LOVE

BY THE CHURCH

AS A “COMMUNITY OF LOVE”

The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love

19. “If you see charity, you see the Trinity”, wrote Saint Augustine. [11] In the foregoing reflections, we have been able to focus our attention on the Pierced one (cf. Jn 19:37, Zech12:10), recognizing the plan of the Father who, moved by love (cf. Jn 3:16), sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem man. By dying on the Cross—as Saint John tells us—Jesus “gave up his Spirit” (Jn19:30), anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit that he would make after his Resurrection (cf. Jn 20:22). This was to fulfill the promise of “rivers of living water” that would flow out of the hearts of believers, through the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Jn 7:38-39). The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. Jn 13:1-13) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. Jn 13:1, 15:13).

The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the
Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this service of charity, on which I want to focus in the second part of the Encyclical.

Charity as a responsibility of the Church

20. Love of neighbor, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level: from the local community to the particular Church and to the Church universal in its entirety. As a community, the Church must practice love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community. The awareness of this responsibility has had a constitutive relevance in the Church from the beginning: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-5). In these words, Saint Luke provides a kind of definition of the Church, whose constitutive elements include fidelity to the “teaching of the Apostles”, “communion” (koinonia), “the breaking of the bread” and “prayer” (cf. Acts 2:42). The element of “communion” (koinonia) is not initially defined, but appears concretely in the verses quoted above: it consists in the fact that believers hold all things in common and that among them, there is no longer any distinction between rich and poor (cf. also Acts 4:32-37). As the Church grew, this radical form of material communion could not in fact be preserved. But its essential core remained: within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life.

21. A decisive step in the difficult search for ways of putting this fundamental ecclesial principle into practice is illustrated in the choice of the seven, which marked the origin of the diaconal office (cf. Acts 6:5-6). In the early Church, in fact, with regard to the daily distribution to
widows, a disparity had arisen between Hebrew speakers and Greek speakers. The Apostles, who had been entrusted primarily with “prayer” (the Eucharist and the liturgy) and the “ministry of the word”, felt overburdened by “serving tables”, so they decided to reserve to themselves the principal duty and to designate for the other task, also necessary in the Church, a group of seven persons. Nor was this group to carry out a purely mechanical work of distribution: they were to be men “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (cf. Acts 6:1-6). In other words, the social service which they were meant to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time it was also a spiritual service; theirs was a truly spiritual office which carried out an essential responsibility of the Church, namely a well-ordered love of neighbor. With the formation of this group of seven, “diaconia”—the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way—became part of the fundamental structure of the Church.

22. As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. A few references will suffice to demonstrate this. Justin Martyr († c. 155) in speaking of the Christians’ celebration of Sunday, also mentions their charitable activity, linked with the Eucharist as such. Those who are able make offerings in accordance with their means, each as he or she wishes; the Bishop in turn makes use of these to support orphans, widows, the sick and those who for other reasons find themselves in need, such as prisoners and foreigners. The great Christian writer Tertullian († after 220) relates how the pagans were struck by the Christians’ concern for the needy of every sort. And when Ignatius of Antioch († c. 117) described the Church of Rome as “presiding in charity (agape)”, we may assume that with this definition he also intended in some sense to express her concrete charitable activity.

23. Here it might be helpful to allude to the earliest legal structures associated with the service of charity in the Church. Towards the middle of
the fourth century we see the development in Egypt of the “diaconia”: the institution within each monastery responsible for all works of relief, that is to say, for the service of charity. By the sixth century this institution had evolved into a corporation with full juridical standing, which the civil authorities themselves entrusted with part of the grain for public distribution. In Egypt not only each monastery, but each individual Diocese eventually had its own diaconia; this institution then developed in both East and West. Pope Gregory the Great († 604) mentions the diaconia of Naples, while in Rome the diaconiae are documented from the seventh and eighth centuries. But charitable activity on behalf of the poor and suffering was naturally an essential part of the Church of Rome from the very beginning, based on the principles of Christian life given in the Acts of the Apostles. It found a vivid expression in the case of the deacon Lawrence († 258). The dramatic description of Lawrence's martyrdom was known to Saint Ambrose († 397) and it provides a fundamentally authentic picture of the saint. As the one responsible for the care of the poor in Rome, Lawrence had been given a period of time, after the capture of the Pope and of Lawrence's fellow deacons, to collect the treasures of the Church and hand them over to the civil authorities. He distributed to the poor whatever funds were available and then presented to the authorities the poor themselves as the real treasure of the Church.[15] Whatever historical reliability one attributes to these details, Lawrence has always remained present in the Church's memory as a great exponent of ecclesial charity.

24. A mention of the emperor Julian the Apostate († 363) can also show how essential the early Church considered the organized practice of charity. As a child of six years, Julian witnessed the assassination of his father, brother and other family members by the guards of the imperial palace; rightly or wrongly, he blamed this brutal act on the Emperor Constantius, who passed himself off as an outstanding Christian. The Christian faith was thus definitively discredited in his eyes. Upon becoming emperor, Julian decided to restore paganism, the ancient Roman religion, while reforming it in the hope of making it the driving force behind the empire. In this project he was amply inspired by Christianity. He established a hierarchy of metropolitans and priests who were to foster love
of God and neighbor. In one of his letters,[16] he wrote that the sole aspect of Christianity which had impressed him was the Church's charitable activity. He thus considered it essential for his new pagan religion that, alongside the system of the Church's charity, an equivalent activity of its own be established. According to him, this was the reason for the popularity of the “Galileans”. They needed now to be imitated and outdone. In this way, then, the Emperor confirmed that charity was a decisive feature of the Christian community, the Church.

25. Thus far, two essential facts have emerged from our reflections:

a) The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.[17]

b) The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas-agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter “by chance” (cf. Lk 10:31), whoever they may be. Without in any way detracting from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the Letter to the Galatians is emphatic: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (6:10).

Justice and Charity

26. Since the nineteenth century, an objection has been raised to the Church's charitable activity, subsequently developed with particular insistence by Marxism: the poor, it is claimed, do not need charity but justice. Works of charity—almsgiving—are in effect a way for the rich to shirk their obligation to work for justice and a means of soothing their consciences, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of
their rights. Instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the status quo, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world's goods and no longer have to depend on charity. There is admittedly some truth to this argument, but also much that is mistaken. It is true that the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State and that the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person, according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods. This has always been emphasized by Christian teaching on the State and by the Church's social doctrine. Historically, the issue of the just ordering of the collectivity had taken a new dimension with the industrialization of society in the nineteenth century. The rise of modern industry caused the old social structures to collapse, while the growth of a class of salaried workers provoked radical changes in the fabric of society. The relationship between capital and labor now became the decisive issue—an issue which in that form was previously unknown. Capital and the means of production were now the new source of power which, concentrated in the hands of a few, led to the suppression of the rights of the working classes, against which they had to rebel.

27. It must be admitted that the Church's leadership was slow to realize that the issue of the just structuring of society needed to be approached in a new way. There were some pioneers, such as Bishop Ketteler of Mainz († 1877), and concrete needs were met by a growing number of groups, associations, leagues, federations and, in particular, by the new religious orders founded in the nineteenth century to combat poverty, disease and the need for better education. In 1891, the papal magisterium intervened with the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of Leo XIII. This was followed in 1931 by Pius XI's Encyclical Quadragesimo Anno. In 1961 Blessed John XXIII published the Encyclical Mater et Magistra, while Paul VI, in the Encyclical Populorum Progressio (1967) and in the Apostolic Letter Octogesima Adveniens (1971), insistently addressed the social problem, which had meanwhile become especially acute in Latin America. My great predecessor John Paul II left us a trilogy of social Encyclicals: Laborem Exercens (1981), Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (1987) and finally Centesimus Annus (1991). Faced with new situations and issues, Catholic social teaching thus gradually developed, and has now found a
comprehensive presentation in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council Iustitia et Pax. Marxism had seen world revolution and its preliminaries as the panacea for the social problem: revolution and the subsequent collectivization of the means of production, so it was claimed, would immediately change things for the better. This illusion has vanished. In today’s complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church’s social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live.

28. In order to define more accurately the relationship between the necessary commitment to justice and the ministry of charity, two fundamental situations need to be considered:

a) The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics. As Augustine once said, a State which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves: “Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia?”[18] Fundamental to Christianity is the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God (cf. Mt 22:21), in other words, the distinction between Church and State, or, as the Second Vatican Council puts it, the autonomy of the temporal sphere.[19] The State may not impose religion, yet it must guarantee religious freedom and harmony between the followers of different religions. For her part, the Church, as the social expression of Christian faith, has a proper independence and is structured on the basis of her faith as a community which the State must recognize. The two spheres are distinct, yet always interrelated.

Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now. But this presupposes an even more radical question: what is justice? The problem is one of practical reason; but if reason is to be exercised properly, it must undergo constant purification,
since it can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests.

Here politics and faith meet. Faith by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God—an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason. But it is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly. This is where Catholic social doctrine has its place: it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just.

The Church's social teaching argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being. It recognizes that it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather, the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.
A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.

b) Love—caritas—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbor is indispensable.\[20\] The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person—every person—needs: namely, loving personal concern. We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support. In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live “by bread alone” (Mt 4:4; cf. Dt 8:3)—a conviction that demeans man and ultimately disregards all that is specifically human.

29. We can now determine more precisely, in the life of the Church, the relationship between commitment to the just ordering of the State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other. We have seen that the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.
The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation “in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.”[21] The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility.[22] Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as “social charity”. [23]

The Church’s charitable organizations, on the other hand, constitute an opus proprium, a task agreeable to her, in which she does not cooperate collaterally, but acts as a subject with direct responsibility, doing what corresponds to her nature. The Church can never be exempted from practicing charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man needs, and will always need, love.

The multiple structures of charitable service in the social context of the present day

30. Before attempting to define the specific profile of the Church’s activities in the service of man, I now wish to consider the overall situation of the struggle for justice and love in the world of today.

a) Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures. This “togetherness” at times gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, yet our ability to know almost instantly about the needs of others challenges us to share their situation and their difficulties. Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different kinds of poverty, both material and spiritual. Our times call for a new readiness to assist our
neighbors in need. The Second Vatican Council had made this point very clearly: “Now that, through better means of communication, distances between peoples have been almost eliminated, charitable activity can and should embrace all people and all needs.”[24]

On the other hand—and here we see one of the challenging yet also positive sides of the process of globalization—we now have at our disposal numerous means for offering humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in need, not least modern systems of distributing food and clothing, and of providing housing and care. Concern for our neighbor transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council rightly observed that “among the signs of our times, one particularly worthy of note is a growing, inescapable sense of solidarity between all peoples.”[25] State agencies and humanitarian associations work to promote this, the former mainly through subsidies or tax relief, the latter by making available considerable resources. The solidarity shown by civil society thus significantly surpasses that shown by individuals.

b) This situation has led to the birth and the growth of many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies, which have borne fruit. Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favoring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.[26] Numerous organizations for charitable or philanthropic purposes have also been established and these are committed to achieving adequate humanitarian solutions to the social and political problems of the day. Significantly, our time has also seen the growth and spread of different kinds of volunteer work, which assume responsibility for providing a variety of services.[27] I wish here to offer a special word of gratitude and appreciation to all those who take part in these activities in whatever way. For young people, this widespread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness to offer others not simply material aid but their very selves. The anti-culture of death, which finds expression for example in drug use, is thus countered by an unselfish love which shows
itself to be a culture of life by the very willingness to “lose itself” (cf. Lk 17:33 et passim) for others.

In the Catholic Church, and also in the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, new forms of charitable activity have arisen, while other, older ones have taken on new life and energy. In these new forms, it is often possible to establish a fruitful link between evangelization and works of charity. Here I would clearly reaffirm what my great predecessor John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* when he asserted the readiness of the Catholic Church to cooperate with the charitable agencies of these Churches and Communities, since we all have the same fundamental motivation and look towards the same goal: a true humanism, which acknowledges that man is made in the image of God and wants to help him to live in a way consonant with that dignity. His Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* emphasized that the building of a better world requires Christians to speak with a united voice in working to inculcate “respect for the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenseless.” Here I would like to express my satisfaction that this appeal has found a wide resonance in numerous initiatives throughout the world.

*The distinctiveness of the Church's charitable activity*

31. The increase in diversified organizations engaged in meeting various human needs is ultimately due to the fact that the command of love of neighbor is inscribed by the Creator in man's very nature. It is also a result of the presence of Christianity in the world, since Christianity constantly revives and acts out this imperative, so often profoundly obscured in the course of time. The reform of paganism attempted by the emperor Julian the Apostate is only an initial example of this effect; here we see how the power of Christianity spread well beyond the frontiers of the Christian faith. For this reason, it is very important that the Church's charitable activity maintains all of its splendor and does not become just another form of social assistance. So what are the essential elements of Christian and ecclesial charity?

a) Following the example given in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and
specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc. The Church’s charitable organizations, beginning with those of Caritas (at diocesan, national and international levels), ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work. Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbor will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6).

b) Christian charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies. It is not a means of changing the world ideologically, and it is not at the service of worldly stratagems, but it is a way of making present here and now the love which man always needs. The modern age, particularly from the nineteenth century on, has been dominated by various versions of a philosophy of progress whose most radical form is Marxism. Part of Marxist strategy is the theory of impoverishment: in a situation of unjust power, it is claimed, anyone who engages in charitable initiatives is actually serving that unjust system, making it appear at least to some extent tolerable. This in turn slows down a potential revolution and thus blocks the struggle for a better world. Seen in this way, charity is rejected and attacked as a means of preserving the status quo. What we have here, though, is really an inhuman philosophy. People of the present are sacrificed to the moloch of the future—a future whose effective realization is
at best doubtful. One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now. We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and program. The Christian's program—the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus—is “a heart which sees”. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly. Obviously when charitable activity is carried out by the Church as a communitarian initiative, the spontaneity of individuals must be combined with planning, foresight and cooperation with other similar institutions.

c) Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practiced as a way of achieving other ends. But this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God. Those who practice charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8) and that God's presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love. He knows—to return to the questions raised earlier—that disdain for love is disdain for God and man alike; it is an attempt to do without God. Consequently, the best defense of God and man consists precisely in love. It is the responsibility of the Church's charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ.

Those responsible for the Church's charitable activity

32. Finally, we must turn our attention once again to those who are responsible for carrying out the Church's charitable activity. As our preceding reflections have made clear, the true subject of the various Catholic organizations that carry out a ministry of charity is the Church herself—at all levels, from the parishes, through the particular Churches, to
the universal Church. For this reason it was most opportune that my venerable predecessor Paul VI established the Pontifical Council Cor Unum as the agency of the Holy See responsible for orienting and coordinating the organizations and charitable activities promoted by the Catholic Church. In conformity with the episcopal structure of the Church, the Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are charged with primary responsibility for carrying out in the particular Churches the program set forth in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 2:42-44): today as in the past, the Church as God's family must be a place where help is given and received, and at the same time, a place where people are also prepared to serve those outside her confines who are in need of help. In the rite of episcopal ordination, prior to the act of consecration itself, the candidate must respond to several questions which express the essential elements of his office and recall the duties of his future ministry. He promises expressly to be, in the Lord's name, welcoming and merciful to the poor and to all those in need of consolation and assistance. The Code of Canon Law, in the canons on the ministry of the Bishop, does not expressly mention charity as a specific sector of episcopal activity, but speaks in general terms of the Bishop's responsibility for coordinating the different works of the apostolate with due regard for their proper character. Recently, however, the Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops explored more specifically the duty of charity as a responsibility incumbent upon the whole Church and upon each Bishop in his Diocese, and it emphasized that the exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning.

33. With regard to the personnel who carry out the Church's charitable activity on the practical level, the essential has already been said: they must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love (cf. Gal 5:6). Consequently, more than anything, they must be persons moved by Christ's love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening within them a love of neighbor. The criterion inspiring their activity should be Saint Paul's statement in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: “the love of Christ urges us on” (5:14). The consciousness that,
in Christ, God has given himself for us, even unto death, must inspire us to live no longer for ourselves but for him, and, with him, for others. Whoever loves Christ loves the Church, and desires the Church to be increasingly the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ. The personnel of every Catholic charitable organization want to work with the Church and therefore with the Bishop, so that the love of God can spread throughout the world. By their sharing in the Church's practice of love, they wish to be witnesses of God and of Christ, and they wish for this very reason freely to do good to all.

34. Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. 1 Cor 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (v. 3). This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.

35. This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world—the Cross—and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own. This duty is a grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: “We are useless servants” (Lk 17:10). We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so. There
are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: “The love of Christ urges us on” (2 Cor 5:14).

36. When we consider the immensity of others' needs, we can, on the one hand, be driven towards an ideology that would aim at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem. Or we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path, without falling into an arrogant contempt for man, something not only unconstructive but actually destructive, or surrendering to a resignation which would prevent us from being guided by love in the service of others. Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbors, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbor but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1996, Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: “We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer”.

37. It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work. Clearly, the Christian who prays does not claim to be able to change God's plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather, he seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with
the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work. A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent man from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism. An authentically religious attitude prevents man from presuming to judge God, accusing him of allowing poverty and failing to have compassion for his creatures. When people claim to build a case against God in defense of man, on whom can they depend when human activity proves powerless?

38. Certainly Job could complain before God about the presence of incomprehensible and apparently unjustified suffering in the world. In his pain he cried out: “Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!... I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?... Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me” (23:3, 5-6, 15-16). Often we cannot understand why God refrains from intervening. Yet he does not prevent us from crying out, like Jesus on the Cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46). We should continue asking this question in prayerful dialogue before his face: “Lord, holy and true, how long will it be?” (Rev 6:10). It is Saint Augustine who gives us faith’s answer to our sufferings: “Si comprehendis, non est Deus”—“if you understand him, he is not God.”[35] Our protest is not meant to challenge God, or to suggest that error, weakness or indifference can be found in him. For the believer, it is impossible to imagine that God is powerless or that “perhaps he is asleep” (cf. 1 Kg 18:27). Instead, our crying out is, as it was for Jesus on the Cross, the deepest and most radical way of affirming our faith in his sovereign power. Even in their bewilderment and failure to understand the world around them, Christians continue to believe in the “goodness and loving kindness of God” (Tit 3:4). Immersed like everyone else in the dramatic complexity of historical events, they remain unshakably certain that God is our Father and loves us, even when his silence remains incomprehensible.

39. Faith, hope and charity go together. Hope is practiced through the virtue of patience, which continues to do good even in the face of apparent failure, and through the virtue of humility, which accepts God’s mystery
and trusts him even at times of darkness. Faith tells us that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives us the victorious certainty that it is really true: God is love! It thus transforms our impatience and our doubts into the sure hope that God holds the world in his hands and that, as the dramatic imagery of the end of the Book of Revelation points out, in spite of all darkness he ultimately triumphs in glory. Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love. Love is the light—and in the end, the only light—that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world—this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical.

CONCLUSION

40. Finally, let us consider the saints, who exercised charity in an exemplary way. Our thoughts turn especially to Martin of Tours († 397), the soldier who became a monk and a bishop: he is almost like an icon, illustrating the irreplaceable value of the individual testimony to charity. At the gates of Amiens, Martin gave half of his cloak to a poor man: Jesus himself, that night, appeared to him in a dream wearing that cloak, confirming the permanent validity of the Gospel saying: “I was naked and you clothed me... as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:36, 40). Yet in the history of the Church, how many other testimonies to charity could be quoted! In particular, the entire monastic movement, from its origins with Saint Anthony the Abbot († 356), expresses an immense service of charity towards neighbor. In his encounter “face to face” with the God who is Love, the monk senses the impelling need to transform his whole life into service of neighbor, in addition to service of God. This explains the great emphasis on hospitality, refuge and care of the infirm in the vicinity of the monasteries. It also explains the immense initiatives of human welfare and Christian formation, aimed above all at the very poor, who became the object of care firstly for the monastic and mendicant orders, and later for the various male and female religious institutes all through the history of the Church. The figures of saints such as Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God,
Camillus of Lellis, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Giuseppe B. Cottolengo, John Bosco, Luigi Orione, Teresa of Calcutta to name but a few—stand out as lasting models of social charity for all people of good will. The saints are the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love.

41. Outstanding among the saints is Mary, Mother of the Lord and mirror of all holiness. In the Gospel of Luke we find her engaged in a service of charity to her cousin Elizabeth, with whom she remained for “about three months” (1:56) so as to assist her in the final phase of her pregnancy. “Magnificat anima mea Dominum”, she says on the occasion of that visit, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Lk 1:46). In these words she expresses her whole program of life: not setting herself at the centre, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbor—only then does goodness enter the world. Mary’s greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly: her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:38, 48). She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God’s initiatives. Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God’s promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises. Mary is a woman of faith: “Blessed are you who believed”, Elizabeth says to her (cf. Lk 1:45). The Magnificat—a portrait, so to speak, of her soul—is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate. Finally, Mary is a woman who loves. How could it be otherwise? As a believer who in faith thinks with God’s thoughts and wills with God’s will, she cannot fail to be a woman who loves. We sense this in her quiet gestures, as recounted by the infancy narratives in the Gospel. We see it in the delicacy with which she
recognizes the need of the spouses at Cana and makes it known to Jesus. We see it in the humility with which she recedes into the background during Jesus' public life, knowing that the Son must establish a new family and that the Mother's hour will come only with the Cross, which will be Jesus' true hour (cf. Jn 2:4; 13:1). When the disciples flee, Mary will remain beneath the Cross (cf. Jn 19:25-27); later, at the hour of Pentecost, it will be they who gather around her as they wait for the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14).

42. The lives of the saints are not limited to their earthly biographies but also include their being and working in God after death. In the saints one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them. In no one do we see this more clearly than in Mary. The words addressed by the crucified Lord to his disciple—to John and through him to all disciples of Jesus: “Behold, your mother!” (Jn 19:27)—are fulfilled anew in every generation. Mary has truly become the Mother of all believers. Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace, in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavors. They constantly experience the gift of her goodness and the unfailing love which she pours out from the depths of her heart. The testimonials of gratitude, offered to her from every continent and culture, are a recognition of that pure love which is not self-seeking but simply benevolent. At the same time, the devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him—a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God's love to become in their turn a fountain from which “flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:38). Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power. To her we entrust the Church and her mission in the service of love:

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

you have given the world its true light,

Jesus, your Son — the Son of God.
You abandoned yourself completely
to God's call
and thus became a wellspring
of the goodness which flows forth from him.
Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.
Teach us to know and love him,
so that we too can become
capable of true love
and be fountains of living water
in the midst of a thirsting world.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 December, the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, in the year 2005, the first of my Pontificate.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

[7] Cf. Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, who in his treatise The Divine Names, IV, 12-14: PG 3, 709-713 calls God both eros and agape.


Homily at the meeting with young people, Krakow (May 28, 2006)

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven?” (Acts 1:11).

Brothers and Sisters, today in Błonie Park in Kraków we hear once again this question from the Acts of the Apostles. This time it is directed to all of us: “Why do you stand looking up to heaven?” The answer to this question involves the fundamental truth about the life and destiny of every man and woman.

The question has to do with our attitude to two basic realities which shape every human life: earth and heaven. First, the earth: “Why do you stand?” - Why are you here on earth? Our answer is that we are here on earth because our Maker has put us here as the crowning work of his creation. Almighty God, in his ineffable plan of love, created the universe, bringing it forth from nothing. Then, at the completion of this work, he bestowed life on men and women, creating them in his own image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27). He gave them the dignity of being children of God and the gift of immortality. We know that man went astray, misused the gift of freedom and said “No” to God, thus condemning himself to a
life marked by evil, sin, suffering and death. But we also know that God was not resigned to this situation, but entered directly into humanity’s history, which then became a history of salvation. “We stand” on the earth, we are rooted in the earth and we grow from it. Here we do good in the many areas of everyday life, in the material and spiritual realms, in our relationships with other people, in our efforts to build up the human community and in culture. Here too we experience the weariness of those who make their way towards a goal by long and winding paths, amid hesitations, tensions, uncertainties, in the conviction that the journey will one day come to an end. That is when the question arises: Is this all there is? Is this earth on which “we stand” our final destiny?

And so we need to turn to the second part of the biblical question: “Why do you stand looking up to heaven?” We have read that, just as the Apostles were asking the Risen Lord about the restoration of Israel’s earthly kingdom, “He was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.” And “they looked up to heaven as he went” (cf. Acts 1:9-10). They looked up to heaven because they looked to Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One, raised up on high. We do not know whether at that precise moment they realized that a magnificent, infinite horizon was opening up before their eyes: the ultimate goal of our earthly pilgrimage. Perhaps they only realized this at Pentecost, in the light of the Holy Spirit. But for us, at a distance of two thousand years, the meaning of that event is quite clear. Here on earth, we are called to look up to heaven, to turn our minds and hearts to the inexpressible mystery of God. We are called to look towards this divine reality, to which we have been directed from our creation. For there we find life’s ultimate meaning.

Dear brothers and sisters, I am deeply moved to be able to celebrate this Eucharist today in Błonie Park in Kraków, where Pope John Paul II often celebrated Mass during his unforgettable Apostolic Visits to his native land. Through his liturgical celebrations he met the People of God in almost every corner of the world, but surely his celebration of Holy Mass in Błonie Park in Kraków was always something special. Here he returned in mind and heart to his roots, to the sources of his faith and his service to the Church. From here he could see Kraków and all Poland. In his first Apostolic Visit to Poland, on 10 June 1979, at the end of his homily in this
Park, he said with nostalgia: “Allow me, before leaving you, to look out once again on Kraków, this Kraków whose every stone and brick is dear to me. And to look out once again from here on Poland.” During the last Mass he celebrated here, on 18 August 2002, he said in his homily: “I am grateful for the invitation to visit my Kraków and for the hospitality you have given me” (no. 2). I wish to take up these words, to make them my own and repeat them today: I thank you with all my heart “for the invitation to visit my Kraków and for the hospitality you have given me.” Kraków, the city of Karol Wojtyła and of John Paul II, is also my Kraków! Kraków has a special place in the hearts of countless Christians throughout the world who know that John Paul II came to the Vatican Hill from this city, from Wawel Hill, “from a far country”, which thus became a country dear to all.

At the beginning of the second year of my Pontificate, I have felt a deep need to visit Poland and Kraków as a pilgrim in the footsteps of my predecessor. I wanted to breathe the air of his homeland. I wanted to see the land where he was born, where he grew up and undertook his tireless service to Christ and the universal Church. I wanted especially to meet the living men and women of his country, to experience your faith, which gave him life and strength, and to know that you continue firm in that faith. Here I wish to ask God to preserve that legacy of faith, hope and charity which John Paul II gave to the world, and to you in particular.

I cordially greet all those gathered in Błonie Park, for as far as my eyes can see and even farther. I wish I could meet each of you personally. I embrace all those who are taking part in our Eucharist by radio and television. I greet all of Poland! I greet the children and young people, individuals and families, the sick and those suffering in body or spirit, who are deprived of the joy of life. I greet all those whose daily labors are helping this country to grow in prosperity. I greet the Polish people living abroad, everywhere in the world. I thank Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kraków, for his warm words of welcome. I greet Cardinal Franciszek Macharski and all the Cardinals, Bishops, priests and consecrated men and women, as well as the other guests who have come from many lands, particularly the neighboring countries. My
greetings go to the President of the Republic and to the Prime Minister, and to the representatives of the national, territorial and local Authorities.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have taken as the motto of my pilgrimage to Poland in the footsteps of John Paul II the words: “Stand firm in your faith!” This appeal is directed to us all as members of the community of Christ’s disciples, to each and every one of us. Faith is a deeply personal and human act, an act which has two aspects. To believe means first to accept as true what our mind cannot fully comprehend. We have to accept what God reveals to us about himself, about ourselves, about everything around us, including the things that are invisible, inexpressible and beyond our imagination. This act of accepting revealed truth broadens the horizon of our knowledge and draws us to the mystery in which our lives are immersed. Letting our reason be limited in this way is not something easy to do. Here we see the second aspect of faith: it is trust in a person, no ordinary person, but Jesus Christ himself. What we believe is important, but even more important is the One in whom we believe.

Saint Paul speaks of this in the passage from the Letter to the Ephesians which we have heard today. God has given us a spirit of wisdom and “enlightened the eyes of our hearts, that we may know what is the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great power in Christ” (cf. Eph 1:17-20). Believing means surrendering ourselves to God and entrusting our destiny to him. Believing means entering into a personal relationship with our Creator and Redeemer in the power of the Holy Spirit, and making this relationship the basis of our whole life.

Today we heard the words of Jesus: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Centuries ago these words reached Poland. They challenged, and continue to challenge all those who say they belong to Christ, who consider his to be the greatest cause. We need to be witnesses of Jesus, who lives in the Church and in human hearts. He has given us a mission. On the day he ascended to heaven, he said to his Apostles: “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation … And they went forth and
preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it” (Mk 16:15,20). Dear brothers and sisters! When Karol Wojtyła was elected to the See of Peter in order to serve the universal Church, your land became a place of special witness to faith in Jesus Christ. You were called to give this witness before the whole world. This vocation of yours is always needed, and it is perhaps even more urgent than ever, now that the Servant of God has passed from this life. Do not deprive the world of this witness!

Before I return to Rome to continue my ministry, I appeal to all of you in the words spoken here by Pope John Paul II in 1979: “You must be strong, dear brothers and sisters. You must be strong with the strength that comes from faith. You must be strong with the strength of faith. You must be faithful. Today, more than in any other age, you need this strength. You must be strong with the strength of hope, the hope that brings perfect joy in life and which prevents us from ever grieving the Holy Spirit! You must be strong with love, the love which is stronger than death... You must be strong with the strength of faith, hope and charity, a charity that is conscious, mature and responsible, and which can help us at this moment of our history to carry on the great dialogue with man and the world, a dialogue rooted in dialogue with God himself, with the Father, through the Son in the Holy Spirit, the dialogue of salvation” (Homily, 10 June 1979, no. 4).

I too, Benedict XVI, the Successor of Pope John Paul II, am asking you to look up from earth to heaven, to lift your eyes to the One to whom succeeding generations have looked for two thousand years, and in whom they have discovered life’s ultimate meaning. Strengthened by faith in God, devote yourselves fervently to consolidating his Kingdom on earth, a Kingdom of goodness, justice, solidarity and mercy. I ask you to bear courageous witness to the Gospel before today’s world, bringing hope to the poor, the suffering, the lost and abandoned, the desperate and those yearning for freedom, truth and peace. By doing good to your neighbor and showing your concern for the common good, you bear witness that God is love.

I ask you, finally, to share with the other peoples of Europe and the world the treasure of your faith, not least as a way of honoring the memory
of your countryman, who, as the Successor of Saint Peter, did this with extraordinary power and effectiveness. And remember me in your prayers and sacrifices, even as you remembered my great Predecessor, so that I can carry out the mission Christ has given me. I ask you to stand firm in your faith! Stand firm in your hope! Stand firm in your love! Amen!

Torna ai contenuti

Homily on the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Vatican Basilica (June 29, 2006)

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16: 18).

What exactly was the Lord saying to Peter with these words? With them, what promise did he make to Peter and what task did he entrust to him? And what is he saying to us - to the Bishop of Rome, who is seated on the chair of Peter, and to the Church today?

If we want to understand the meaning of Jesus' words, it is useful to remember that the Gospels recount for us three different situations in which the Lord, each time in a special way, transmits to Peter his future task. The task is always the same, but what the Lord was and is concerned with becomes clearer to us from the diversity of the situations and images used.

In the Gospel according to St Matthew that we have just heard, Peter makes his own confession to Jesus, recognizing him as the Messiah and Son of God. On the basis of this, his special task is conferred upon him though three images: the rock that becomes the foundation or cornerstone, the keys, and the image of binding and loosing.

I do not intend here to interpret once again these three images that the Church down the ages has explained over and over again; rather, I would like to call attention to the geographical place and chronological context of these words.

The promise is made at the sources of the Jordan, on the boundary of the Judaic Land, on the frontiers of the pagan world. The moment of the
promise marks a crucial turning-point in Jesus’ journey: the Lord now sets out for Jerusalem and for the first time, he tells the disciples that this journey to the Holy City is the journey to the Cross: "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Mt 16: 21).

Both these things go together and determine the inner place of the Primacy, indeed, of the Church in general: the Lord is continuously on his way towards the Cross, towards the lowliness of the servant of God, suffering and killed, but at the same time he is also on the way to the immensity of the world in which he precedes us as the Risen One, so that the light of his words and the presence of his love may shine forth in the world; he is on the way so that through him, the Crucified and Risen Christ, God himself, may arrive in the world.

In this regard, Peter describes himself in his First Letter as "a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed" (I Pt 5: 1). For the Church, Good Friday and Easter have always existed together; she is always both the mustard seed and the tree in whose boughs the birds of the air make their nests.

The Church - and in her, Christ - still suffers today. In her, Christ is again and again taunted and slapped; again and again an effort is made to reject him from the world. Again and again the little barque of the Church is ripped apart by the winds of ideologies, whose waters seep into her and seem to condemn her to sink. Yet, precisely in the suffering Church, Christ is victorious.

In spite of all, faith in him recovers ever new strength. The Lord also commands the waters today and shows that he is the Lord of the elements. He stays in his barque, in the little boat of the Church.

Thus, on the one hand, the weakness proper to human beings is revealed in Peter's ministry, but at the same time, also God’s power: in the weakness of human beings itself the Lord shows his strength; he demonstrates that it is through frail human beings that he himself builds his Church.

Let us now turn to the Gospel according to St Luke, which tells us that
during the Last Supper, the Lord once again confers a special task upon Peter (cf. Lk 22: 31-33). This time, the Lord's words addressed to Simon are found immediately after the Institution of the Most Blessed Eucharist. The Lord has just given himself to his followers under the species of bread and wine. We can see the Institution of the Eucharist as the true and proper founding act of the Church.

Through the Eucharist, the Lord not only gives himself to his own but also gives them the reality of a new communion among themselves which is extended in time, "until he comes" (cf. I Cor 11: 26).

Through the Eucharist, the disciples become his living dwelling place which, as history unfolds, grows like the new and living temple of God in this world. Thus, immediately after the Institution of the Sacrament, Jesus speaks of what being disciples, of what the "ministry", means in the new community: he says that it is a commitment of service, just as he himself is among them as One who serves.

And then he addresses Peter. He says that Satan has demanded to have him so that he may sift him like wheat. This calls to mind the passage in the Book of Job, where Satan asks God for the power to afflict Job. The devil - the slanderer of God and men - thereby wants to prove that no true religious feeling exists, but that in man every aim is always solely utilitarian.

In the case of Job, God grants Satan the asked-for freedom precisely to be able by so doing to defend his creature - man - and himself. And this also happens with Jesus' disciples. God gives a certain liberty to Satan in all times.

To us it oftentimes seems that God allows Satan too much freedom, that he grants him the power to distress us too terribly; and that this gets the better of our forces and oppresses us too heavily. Again and again we cry out to God: "Alas, look at the misery of your disciples! Ah, protect us!". In fact, Jesus continues: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Lk 22: 32).

Jesus' prayer is the limit set upon the power of the devil. Jesus' prayer is the protection of the Church. We can seek refuge under this protection,
cling on to it and be safe. But - as he says in the Gospel - Jesus prays in a particular way for Peter: "...that your faith may not fail".

Jesus' prayer is at the same time a promise and a duty. Jesus' prayer safeguards Peter's faith, that faith which he confessed at Caesarea Philippi: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16: 16). And so, never let this faith be silenced; strengthen it over and over again, even in the face of the cross and all the world's contradictions: this is Peter's task.

Therefore, the point is that the Lord does not only pray for Peter's personal faith, but for his faith as a service to others. This is exactly what he means with the words: "When you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22: 32).

"When you have turned again": these words are at the same time a prophecy and a promise. They prophesy the weakness of Simon, who was to deny to a maid and a servant that he knew Christ. Through this fall, Peter - and with him the Church of all times - has to learn that one's own strength alone does not suffice to build and guide the Lord's Church. No one succeeds on his or her own. However capable and clever Peter may seem - already at the first moment of trial he fails.

"When you have turned again": the Lord, who predicted his fall, also promises him conversion: "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter..." (Lk 22: 61). Jesus' look works the transformation and becomes Peter's salvation: "he went out and wept bitterly" (Lk 22: 62).

Let us implore ever anew this saving gaze of Jesus: for all those who have responsibility in the Church; for all who suffer the bewilderment of these times; for the great and for the small: Lord, look at us ever anew, pick us up every time we fall and take us in your good hands.

It is through the promise of his prayer that the Lord entrusts to Peter the task for the brethren. Peter's responsibility is anchored in Jesus' prayer. It is this that gives him the certainty that he will persevere through all human miseries.

And the Lord entrusts this task to him in the context of the Supper, in connection with the gift of the Most Holy Eucharist. The Church, established in the institution of the Eucharist, in her inmost self is a
Eucharistic community, hence, communion in the Body of the Lord. Peter's task is to preside over this universal communion; to keep it present in the world also as visible, incarnate unity. He, together with the whole Church of Rome – as St Ignatius of Antioch said –, must preside in charity: preside over the community with that love which comes from Christ and ever anew surpasses the limitations of the private sphere to bring God's love to the ends of the earth.

The third reference to the Primacy is found in the Gospel according to St John (21: 15-19). The Lord is risen, and as the Risen One he entrusts his flock to Peter. Here too, the Cross and the Resurrection are interconnected. Jesus predicts to Peter that he is to take the way of the Cross. In this Basilica built over the tomb of Peter – a tomb of the poor – we see that in this very way the Lord, through the Cross, is always victorious. His power is not a power according to the ways of this world. It is the power of goodness: of truth and of love, which is stronger than death.

Yes, his promise is true: the powers of death, the gates of hell, will not prevail against the Church which he built on Peter (cf. Mt 16: 18) and which he, in this very way, continues to build personally.

On this Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, I address you especially, dear Metropolitans, who have come from many countries of the world to receive the Pallium from the Successor of Peter. I offer you a cordial greeting, together with all those who have accompanied you.

I also greet with special joy the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, led by His Eminence Ioannis Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon and President of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholics and the Orthodox. I am grateful to Patriarch Bartholomew I and to the Holy Synod for this sign of brotherhood that demonstrates the desire and the commitment to progress more swiftly on the path of full unity that Christ invoked for all his disciples. We feel we share the ardent desire, once expressed by Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI, to drink together from the same Cup and to eat together the Bread which is the Lord himself. Let us implore once again on this occasion that this gift may soon be granted to us.
And let us thank the Lord that we are united in the confession Peter made on behalf of all the disciples at Caesarea Philippi: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". Let us together bring this confession to the contemporary world.

May the Lord help us at this very moment in our history to be true witnesses of the sufferings of Christ as well as partakers in the glory that is to be revealed (cf. I Pt 5: 1). Amen.

Greeting at the gathering with young people, Krakow (May 27, 2006)

Dear Young Friends,

I offer all of you my warmest welcome! Your presence makes me happy. I thank the Lord for this cordial meeting. We know that “where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, he is in their midst” (cf. Mt 18:20). Today, you are much more numerous! Accordingly, Jesus is here with us. He is present among the young people of Poland, speaking to them of a house that will never collapse because it is built on the rock. This is the Gospel that we have just heard (cf. Mt 7:24-27).

My friends, in the heart of every man there is the desire for a house. Even more so in the young person’s heart there is a great longing for a proper house, a stable house, one to which he can not only return with joy, but where every guest who arrives can be joyfully welcomed. There is a yearning for a house where the daily bread is love, pardon and understanding. It is a place where the truth is the source out of which flows peace of heart. There is a longing for a house you can be proud of, where you need not be ashamed and where you never fear its loss. These longings are simply the desire for a full, happy and successful life. Do not be afraid of this desire! Do not run away from this desire! Do not be discouraged at the sight of crumbling houses, frustrated desires and faded longings. God the Creator, who inspires in young hearts an immense
yearning for happiness, will not abandon you in the difficult construction of the house called life.

My friends, this brings about a question: “How do we build this house?” Without doubt, this is a question that you have already faced many times and that you will face many times more. Every day you must look into your heart and ask: “How do I build that house called life?” Jesus, whose words we just heard in the passage from the evangelist Matthew, encourages us to build on the rock. In fact, it is only in this way that the house will not crumble. But what does it mean to build a house on the rock? Building on the rock means, first of all, to build on Christ and with Christ. Jesus says: “Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock” ( Mt 7:24). These are not just the empty words of some person or another; these are the words of Jesus. We are not listening to any person: we are listening to Jesus. We are not asked to commit to just anything; we are asked to commit ourselves to the words of Jesus.

To build on Christ and with Christ means to build on a foundation that is called “crucified love”. It means to build with Someone who, knowing us better than we know ourselves, says to us: “You are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you” ( Is 43:4). It means to build with Someone, who is always faithful, even when we are lacking in faith, because he cannot deny himself (cf. 2 Tim 2:13). It means to build with Someone who constantly looks down on the wounded heart of man and says: “I do not condemn you, go and do not sin again” (cf. Jn 8:11). It means to build with Someone who, from the Cross, extends his arms and repeats for all eternity: “O man, I give my life for you because I love you.” In short, building on Christ means basing all your desires, aspirations, dreams, ambitions and plans on his will. It means saying to yourself, to your family, to your friends, to the whole world and, above all to Christ: “Lord, in life I wish to do nothing against you, because you know what is best for me. Only you have the words of eternal life” (cf. Jn 6:68). My friends, do not be afraid to lean on Christ! Long for Christ, as the foundation of your life! Enkindle within you the desire to build your life on him and for him! Because no one who depends on the crucified love of the Incarnate Word can ever lose.
To build on the rock means to build on Christ and with Christ, who is the rock. In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul, speaking of the journey of the chosen people through the desert, explains that all “drank from the supernatural rock, which followed them, and the rock was Christ” (*1 Cor* 10:4). The fathers of the Chosen People certainly did not know that the rock was Christ. They were not aware of being accompanied by him who in the fullness of time would become incarnate and take on a human body. They did not need to understand that their thirst would be satiated by the very Source of life, capable of offering the living water which quenches every heart. Nonetheless, they drank from this spiritual rock that is Christ, because they yearned for this living water, and needed it. On the road of life we may sometimes not be aware of Jesus’ presence. However, it is really this presence, living and true, in the work of creation, in the Word of God and in the Eucharist, in the community of believers and in every man redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ, which is the inexhaustible source of human strength. Jesus of Nazareth, God made Man, is beside us during the good times and the bad times and he thirsts for this relationship, which is, in reality, the foundation of authentic humanity. We read in the book of Revelation these important words: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come to him and eat with him, and he with me” (*Rev* 3:20).

My friends, what does it mean to build on the rock? Building on the rock also means building on Someone who was rejected. Saint Peter speaks to the faithful of Christ as a “living stone rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious” (*1 Pet* 2:4). The undeniable fact of the election of Jesus by God does not conceal the mystery of evil, whereby man is able to reject Him who has loved to the very end. This rejection of Jesus by man, which Saint Peter mentions, extends throughout human history, even to our own time. One does not need great mental acuity to be aware of the many ways of rejecting Christ, even on our own doorstep. Often, Jesus is ignored, he is mocked and he is declared a king of the past who is not for today and certainly not for tomorrow. He is relegated to a storeroom of questions and persons one dare not mention publicly in a loud voice. If in the process of building the house of your life you encounter those who scorn the foundation on which you are building, do not be discouraged! A
strong faith must endure tests. A living faith must always grow. Our faith in Jesus Christ, to be such, must frequently face others’ lack of faith.

Dear friends, what does it mean to build on the rock? Building on the rock means being aware that there will be misfortunes. Christ says: “The rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon the house...” (Mt 7:25). These natural phenomena are not only an image of the many misfortunes of the human lot, but they also indicate that such misfortunes are normally to be expected. Christ does not promise that a downpour will never inundate a house under construction, he does not promise that a devastating wave will never sweep away that which is most dear to us, he does not promise that strong winds will never carry away what we have built, sometimes with enormous sacrifice. Christ not only understands man’s desire for a lasting house, but he is also fully aware of all that can wreck man’s happiness. Do not be surprised therefore by misfortunes, whatever they may be! Do not be discouraged by them! An edifice built on the rock is not the same as a building removed from the forces of nature, which are inscribed in the mystery of man. To have built on rock means being able to count on the knowledge that at difficult times there is a reliable force upon which you can trust.

My friends, allow me to ask again: what does it mean to build on the rock? It means to build wisely. It is not without reason that Jesus compares those who hear his words and put them into practice to a wise man who has built his house on the rock. It is foolish, in fact, to build on sand, when you can do so on rock and therefore have a house that is capable of withstanding every storm. It is foolish to build a house on ground that that does not offer the guarantee of support during the most difficult times. Maybe it is easier to base one’s life on the shifting sands of one’s own worldview, building a future far from the word of Jesus and sometimes even opposed to it. Be assured that he who builds in this way is not prudent, because he wants to convince himself and others that in his life no storm will rage and no wave will strike his house. To be wise means to know that the solidity of a house depends on the choice of foundation. Do not be afraid to be wise; that is to say, do not be afraid to build on the rock!

My friends, once again: what does it mean to build on the rock? Building on the rock also means to build on Peter and with Peter. In fact
the Lord said to him: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). If Christ, the Rock, the living and precious stone, calls his Apostle “rock”, it means that he wants Peter, and together with him the entire Church, to be a visible sign of the one Savior and Lord. Here, in Kraków, the beloved city of my Predecessor John Paul II, no one is astonished by the words “to build with Peter and on Peter”. For this reason I say to you: do not be afraid to build your life on the Church and with the Church. You are all proud of the love you have for Peter and for the Church entrusted to him. Do not be fooled by those who want to play Christ against the Church. There is one foundation on which it is worthwhile to build a house. This foundation is Christ. There is only one rock on which it is worthwhile to place everything. This rock is the one to whom Christ said: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16:18). Young people, you know well the Rock of our times. Accordingly, do not forget that neither that Peter who is watching our gathering from the window of God the Father, nor this Peter who is now standing in front of you, nor any successive Peter will ever be opposed to you or the building of a lasting house on the rock. Indeed, he will offer his heart and his hands to help you construct a life on Christ and with Christ.

Dear friends, meditating on Christ’s words describing the rock as an adequate foundation for a house; we cannot help but notice that the last word is a hopeful one. Jesus says that, notwithstanding the harshness of the elements, the house is not destroyed, because it was built on the rock. In his word there is an extraordinary confidence in the strength of the foundation, a faith that does not fear contradictions because it is confirmed by the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the faith that years later was professed by Saint Peter in his letter: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame” (1 Pet 2:6). Certainly “he will not be put to shame.”

Dear young friends, the fear of failure can at times frustrate even the most beautiful dreams. It can paralyze the will, making one incapable of believing that it is really possible to build a house on the rock. It can convince one that the yearning for such a house is only a childish aspiration and not a plan for life. Together with Jesus, say to this fear: “A house
Homily on the occasion of the bestowing of the cardinals' rings on the new cardinals, St. Peter's Square (March 25, 2006)

Dear Cardinals and Patriarchs,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For me it is a source of great joy to preside at this concelebration with the new Cardinals after yesterday's Consistory, and I consider it providential that it should take place on the liturgical Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord and under the sunshine that the Lord gives us. In the Incarnation of the Son of God, in fact, we recognize the origins of the Church. Everything began from there. Every historical realization of the Church and every one of her institutions must be shaped by that primordial wellspring.

They must be shaped by Christ, the incarnate Word of God. It is he that we are constantly celebrating: Emmanuel, God-with-us, through whom the saving will of God the Father has been accomplished.

And yet - today of all days we contemplate this aspect of the Mystery - the divine wellspring flows through a privileged channel: the Virgin Mary.

St Bernard speaks of this using the eloquent image of aquaeductus (cf. Sermo in Nativitate B.V. Mariae: PL 183, 437-448). In celebrating the Incarnation of the Son, therefore, we cannot fail to honor his Mother. The Angel's proclamation was addressed to her; she accepted it, and when she responded from the depths of her heart: "Here I am... let it be done to me..."
according to your word" (Lk 1: 38), at that moment the eternal Word began to exist as a human being in time.

From generation to generation, the wonder evoked by this ineffable mystery never ceases. St Augustine imagines a dialogue between himself and the Angel of the Annunciation, in which he asks: "Tell me, O Angel, why did this happen in Mary?". The answer, says the Messenger, is contained in the very words of the greeting: "Hail, full of grace" (cf. Sermo 291: 6).

In fact, the Angel, "appearing to her", does not call her by her earthly name, Mary, but by her divine name, as she has always been seen and characterized by God: "Full of grace - gratia plena", which in the original Greek is, "full of grace", and the grace is none other than the love of God; thus, in the end, we can translate this word: "beloved" of God (cf. Lk 1: 28). Origen observes that no such title had ever been given to a human being, and that it is unparalleled in all of Sacred Scripture (cf. In Lucam 6: 7).

It is a title expressed in passive form, but this "passivity" of Mary, who has always been and is for ever "loved" by the Lord, implies her free consent, her personal and original response: in being loved, in receiving the gift of God, Mary is fully active, because she accepts with personal generosity the wave of God’s love poured out upon her. In this too, she is the perfect disciple of her Son, who realizes the fullness of his freedom and thus exercises the freedom through obedience to the Father.

In the Second Reading, we heard the wonderful passage in which the author of the Letter to the Hebrews interprets Psalm 39 in the light of Christ’s Incarnation: "When Christ came into the world, he said:..."Here I am, I have come to do your will, O God!" (Heb 10: 5-7). Before the mystery of these two "Here I am" statements, the "Here I am" of the Son and the "Here I am" of the Mother, each of which is reflected in the other, forming a single Amen to God’s loving will, we are filled with wonder and thanksgiving, and we bow down in adoration.

What a great gift, dear Brothers, to be able to conduct this evocative celebration on the Solemnity of the Lord’s Annunciation! What an
abundance of light we can draw from this mystery for our lives as ministers of the Church!

You above all, dear new Cardinals, what great sustenance you can receive for your mission as the eminent "Senate" of Peter's Successor! This providential circumstance helps us to consider today's event, which emphasizes the Petrine principle of the Church, in the light of the other principle, the Marian one, which is even more fundamental. The importance of the Marian principle in the Church was particularly highlighted, after the Council, by my beloved Predecessor Pope John Paul II in harmony with his motto Totus tuus.

In his spirituality and in his tireless ministry, the presence of Mary as Mother and Queen of the Church was made manifest to the eyes of all. More than ever he adverted to her maternal presence in the assassination attempt of 13 May 1981 here in St Peter's Square. In memory of that tragic event, he had a mosaic of the Virgin placed high up in the Apostolic Palace looking down over St Peter's Square, so as to accompany the key moments and the daily unfolding of his long reign. It is just one year since his Pontificate entered its final phase, full of suffering and yet triumphant and truly paschal.

The icon of the Annunciation, more than any other, helps us to see clearly how everything in the Church goes back to that mystery of Mary's acceptance of the divine Word, by which, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the Covenant between God and humanity was perfectly sealed. Everything in the Church, every institution and ministry, including that of Peter and his Successors, is "included" under the Virgin's mantle, within the grace-filled horizon of her "yes" to God's will. This link with Mary naturally evokes a strong affective resonance in all of us, but first of all it has an objective value.

Between Mary and the Church there is indeed a connatural relationship that was strongly emphasized by the Second Vatican Council in its felicitous decision to place the treatment of the Blessed Virgin at the conclusion of the Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium.

The theme of the relationship between the Petrine principle and the Marian principle is also found in the symbol of the ring which I am about
to consign to you. The ring is always a nuptial sign. Almost all of you have already received one, on the day of your episcopal ordination, as an expression of your fidelity and your commitment to watch over the holy Church, the bride of Christ (cf. Rite of Ordination of Bishops).

The ring which I confer upon you today, proper to the cardinalatial dignity, is intended to confirm and strengthen that commitment, arising once more from a nuptial gift, a reminder to you that first and foremost you are intimately united with Christ so as to accomplish your mission as bridegrooms of the Church. May your acceptance of the ring be for you a renewal of your "yes", your "here I am", addressed both to the Lord Jesus who chose you and constituted you, and to his holy Church, which you are called to serve with the love of a spouse.

So the two dimensions of the Church, Marian and Petrine, come together in the supreme value of charity, which constitutes the fulfillment of each. As St Paul says, charity is the "greatest" charism, the "most excellent way" (I Cor 12: 31; 13: 13).

Everything in this world will pass away. In eternity only Love will remain. For this reason, my Brothers, taking the opportunity offered by this favorable time of Lent, let us commit ourselves to ensure that everything in our personal lives and in the ecclesial activity in which we are engaged is inspired by charity and leads to charity. In this respect too, we are enlightened by the mystery that we are celebrating today.

Indeed, the first thing that Mary did after receiving the Angel's message was to go "in haste" to the house of her cousin Elizabeth in order to be of service to her (cf. Lk 1: 39). The Virgin's initiative was one of genuine charity; it was humble and courageous, motivated by faith in God's Word and the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. Those who love forget about themselves and place themselves at the service of their neighbor. Here we have the image and model of the Church!

Every Ecclesial Community, like the Mother of Christ, is called to accept with total generosity the mystery of God who comes to dwell within her and guides her steps in the ways of love. This is the path along which I chose to launch my Pontificate, inviting everyone, with my first Encyclical,
to build up the Church in charity as a "community of love" (cf. Deus Caritas Est, Part II).

In pursuing this objective, venerable Brother Cardinals, your spiritual closeness and active assistance is a great support and comfort to me. For this I thank you, and at the same time I invite all of you, priests, deacons, Religious and lay faithful, to join together in invoking the Holy Spirit, praying that the College of Cardinals may be ever more ardent in pastoral charity, so as to help the whole Church to radiate Christ's love in the world, to the praise and glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen!

Torna ai contenuti

Address to the participants in the UNIV International Congress, Rome (April 10, 2006)

Dear Friends,

I offer a cordial welcome to all of you who, continuing a tradition that has now existed for several years, have come to Rome to live Holy Week and take part in the international UNIV meeting. You belong, as one can see, to numerous countries and are diligently devoted to the activities of Christian formation that the Prelature of Opus Dei promotes in your city. Welcome to this meeting and thank you for coming.

I greet in particular your Bishop Prelate, Javier Echevarría Rodríguez, as well as your young representative, and I express my gratitude to them for the sentiments expressed to me on behalf of all.

Your presence in Rome, the heart of the Christian world, gives you an opportunity to live the Paschal Mystery intensely during Holy Week. In particular, it enables you to have a more intimate encounter with Christ, especially through contemplation of his Passion, death and Resurrection.

Christ guides you through life

As I wrote in my Message for the 21st World Youth Day, it is he who guides your steps, your university studies and your friendships in the
comings and goings of daily life. Moreover, for each one of you, as for the Apostles, the personal encounter with the divine Teacher who calls you friends (cf. Jn 15: 15) can be the beginning of an extraordinary adventure: that of becoming apostles among your peers, to lead them to have the same experience as you of friendship with God made Man, with God who made himself my friend. Never forget, dear young people, that in the end your happiness, our happiness, depends on the encounter with Jesus and on friendship with him.

I find the topic you are studying at your Congress very interesting: that is, *culture and the means of social communication*. Unfortunately, we are obliged to note that in our time the new technologies and the mass media do not always encourage personal relations, sincere dialogue and friendship between people; nor do they always help to cultivate the interiority of the relationship with God.

For you, as I know well, friendship and contact with others, especially with your peers, are an important part of everyday life. You must view Jesus as one of your dearest friends, indeed, the dearest. Then you will see how friendship with him will lead you to open yourselves to others, whom you consider as brothers or sisters, maintaining with each one a relationship of sincere friendship.

In fact, Jesus Christ is truly "the incarnate love of God" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 12), and in him alone can we find the strength to offer our brothers and sisters human affection and supernatural love in a spirit of service, expressed above all in understanding.

It is great to feel oneself understood by another and to begin to understand the other person.

Dear young people, may I repeat to you what I said to your peers gathered at Cologne in August last year: those who have discovered Christ must bring others to him too, given that a great joy should not be kept for oneself but passed on.

This is the task to which the Lord calls you; this is the "apostolate of friendship" that St Josemaría, Founder of *Opus Dei*, described as "a personal' friendship, self-sacrificing and sincere: face to face, heart to
heart" (*Furrow*, n. 191). Every Christian is asked to be a friend of God and with God's grace, attract his own friends to him.

In this way, apostolic love becomes an authentic passion that is expressed in communicating to others the happiness to be found in Jesus. Again, it is St Josemaría who reminds you of some key words in your spiritual itinerary: "Communion, union, conversation, confidence: Word, Bread, Love" (*The Way*, n. 535), the important words that express the essential milestones on our way.

If you cultivate friendship with Jesus, if you are diligent in receiving the sacraments, and especially the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, you will be able to become the "new generation of apostles anchored firmly in the Word of Christ, capable of responding to the challenges of our times and prepared to spread the Gospel far and wide" (*Message for the 21st World Youth Day*, 22 February 2006; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 1 March, p. 3).

May the Blessed Virgin help you say your "yes" to the Lord, who calls you to follow him always, and may St Josemaría intercede for you. As I express the hope that you will spend Holy Week in prayer and reflection, in contact with many of the early remains of the Christian faith in Rome, I bless with affection all those who are in charge of your formation and all your loved ones.
PRELATE

• Activities of the Prelate
• Pastoral Letters
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Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral trips: Switzerland, Chieti, Russia and Genoa

The Prelate of Opus Dei was in Switzerland from February 3 to 5, 2006.

On Friday, the 3rd, shortly after arriving in Zurich, he had a meeting with the Regional directors of the Prelature.

On Saturday, the 4th, at ten in the morning he received a large group of women from all over Switzerland, and at eleven a group of men. The second meeting also included, besides faithful of the Prelature, priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. The Prelate encouraged everyone to be generous in living certain aspects of Christian life that he felt it opportune to emphasize.

In the afternoon, more than five hundred people attended a meeting with Bishop Echevarría in the Orion Swissôtel. He began by saying, “I have many reasons to thank our Lord for the few hours I am going to spend in Switzerland.” He recalled that it was in Switzerland, specifically in Einsiedeln, where the second General Congress of Opus Dei was held in 1956. There, among other things, it was decided to transfer the General Council to the Eternal City: “At that time,” Bishop Echevarría recalled, “there were some three or four thousand people in Opus Dei, no more. When St. Josemaría went to heaven in 1975, there were sixty thousand people in Opus Dei. And I was thinking yesterday that Switzerland has a large part of the ‘fault’ for this expansion. Because it was here that he prayed a great deal and had the opportunity to make so many apostolic plans. And I'm sure it will please you to know that now there are people in the Prelature of Opus Dei from all the continents, of every language and race.”

Responding to questions, he recalled how important it is that husband and wife be closely united. They need to know how to understand one another, to excuse and forgive when necessary. Many parents mentioned
their concerns about the challenge of raising their children, and Bishop Echevarría passed on some experiences about the importance of parents being friends with their children and making demands on them. He also encouraged the parents, with specific details, to be vigilant regarding how their children use their leisure time, and especially their use of video games, whose content, unfortunately, is not always formative.

On Sunday, February 5, he traveled to Lugano. There he celebrated Holy Mass and blessed the oratory in the Montebrè Cultural Center. About eighty people took part in the ceremony. After Mass, Bishop Echevarría greeted everyone present, one by one. In the afternoon, after a get-together in the Alzavola Youth Club with women of the Prelature, he began his return trip to Rome.

**Chieti (Italy)**

On February 12, the Prelate of Opus Dei took part in a ceremony in Chieti to commemorate the first anniversary of the dedication of a plaza to St. Josemaría. The plaza is in the upper part of the city, close to the cathedral. The escalator that connects the interurban bus station with the historic center of city ends right in this plaza.

As soon as he arrived in Chieti, at ten in the morning, the Prelate visited Archbishop Bruno Forte. The two then made their way to St. Josemaría Plaza and, from there, went to the conference hall where the public ceremony was to take place. The hall was filled with representatives from civil and military institutions and people from all over the Abruzzo region.

Archbishop Forte’s opening address emphasized the catholic and therefore universal message of St. Josemaría. He said that fidelity to God and fidelity to mankind had to go hand in hand in a single Christian faithfulness. Only thus, said Archbishop Fore, is it possible to construct a more authentic and just society. At the end of his address, the Archbishop recalled the spiritual bonds that linked St. Josemaría with the Abruzzo region, and in particular he spoke about Fr. Renato Mariani, one of the first Italian members of Opus Dei.

At the end, Bishop Echevarría said a few words. Work, ethics and the importance of the family were some of the topics touched upon by the
Prelate of Opus Dei in his explanation of St. Josemaría’s message. In regard to work, he pointed out the double meaning, subjective and objective, of the universality of the call to holiness preached by the Founder of Opus Dei. “If all are called to the fullness of love, we can’t consider only certain human activities as privileged channels, special paths to holiness.”[1]

Finally, the Prelate presided over a Eucharistic concelebration in St. Justin’s Cathedral. His homily stressed the importance of the sacrament of Penance.[2]

Upon leaving the church, he stopped to greet those present, among whom were many faithful of Opus Dei from the Abruzzo region with their families.

Russia

The Prelate of Opus Dei made his first pastoral trip to Russia from the 18th to the 23rd of April, 2006.

He landed in Moscow on April 18 in mid-afternoon. In the Russian capital he visited Archbishop Thaddeus Kondrusievich and the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Mennini. He also had a get-together with some seventy people, including faithful of Opus Dei, Cooperators and friends. The Prelate celebrated Holy Mass in the Church of St. Louis, and also prayed in the Catholic Cathedral of Moscow and in a number of Orthodox Churches. On April 20 in the afternoon, he left for St. Petersburg.

In this Baltic city, the Prelate celebrated Holy Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes and visited the pastor of the Orthodox Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan. From St. Petersburg he went to Pushkin, where two priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross are entrusted with a Catholic parish. In Pushkin he had a catechetical get-together with some 25 people and celebrated Sunday Mass for the parish faithful.

He returned to Rome on Sunday, April 23, in the afternoon.

Genoa (Italy)

June 23 was the date of the sixtieth anniversary of the first Mass of St. Josemaría in Italy. Although the exact location is uncertain, the Mass was
most likely celebrated in the Church of San Sisto e Maria Bambina, in Genoa.

Shortly before midnight, on June 22, 1946, St. Josemaría had disembarked in Genoa after traveling by ship from Barcelona. Before setting out, he placed his trip to Italy in the hands of the Patroness of Barcelona, Our Lady of Ransom. Don Álvaro del Portillo was waiting for him in Genoa, and was to accompany him the following day to Rome, the see of the Vicar of Christ. St. Josemaría saw the need to ask for pontifical approval for Opus Dei, which during those years was beginning its apostolic expansion outside Spain. In the morning, before leaving for Rome, they celebrated Holy Mass, and St. Josemaría entrusted to our Lord all the intentions he was bringing to the Eternal City. The Prelate of Opus Dei wanted to unite himself to these intentions on his two-day visit to Genoa.

Upon arriving, on the afternoon of June 21, he went to the Delle Peschiere Residence. On the following day, in the morning, he celebrated Holy Mass in the Capodifaro Residence, and afterwards he had get-togethers in the Prelature’s two Centers in Genoa with the people living there and those who take part in their apostolic activities. The questions raised in both gatherings led him to speak about St. Josemaría’s 1946 trip, from which so much good for the Church and for Opus Dei has stemmed. He also recalled St. Josemaría’s first night in Rome, spent in prayer for the Holy Father on the terrace of the apartment on the Plaza of Città Leonina. He encouraged everyone to imitate the Founder of Opus Dei’s heroic generosity and to launch out in an intense apostolate in all their surroundings.

In the afternoon, the Prelate went to the Church of San Sisto e Maria Bambina, where he was met by the pastor. There he spent some minutes recollected in prayer. Afterwards he went to visit the city’s archbishop, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, to whom he wished a fruitful work in his future position as Secretary of State for the Holy See, which the Pope had appointed him that very day. The Cardinal, who on the following day was to celebrate the liturgical feast of St. Josemaría, thanked the Prelate for the work of the faithful of Opus Dei in Genoa.
Pastoral Letters

Letter of the Prelature for Lent (March 1, 2006)

A pastoral letter from the Prelate for Lent

Lent is “a privileged time of interior pilgrimage towards the One who is the fount of mercy. It is a pilgrimage on which He himself accompanies us through the desert of our poverty, sustaining us on our journey towards the deep joy of Easter” (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2006).

Through its insistent invitation to prepare ourselves for the Easter celebrations, the liturgy in the upcoming days urges us to pray with greater intensity and constancy, to be more generous in offering mortifications and in carrying out works of mercy. This last point is the aspect that Pope Benedict XVI wanted to emphasize in his Message, in choosing as his theme the Gospel verse: “When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them” (Mt 9:36). We can and should apply these words of St. Matthew to our daily lives, characterized by constant contact with a wide variety of people: in our family, at work, when resting, in social relationships....

The Holy Father reminds us that we have to strive, in all moments, to look upon others as our Lord looked upon them and try to help them. We need to see, in those around us, without excluding anyone, souls redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ (Cf. 1 Cor 6:20). Just as twenty centuries ago, “Christ’s compassionate ‘look’ continues to fall upon
individuals and peoples, knowing that the divine plan includes their call to salvation. Jesus knows the perils that put this plan at risk, and He is moved with pity for the crowds. He chooses to defend them from the wolves even at the cost of his own life. Jesus’ gaze embraces individuals and multitudes, and he brings them all before the Father, offering Himself as a sacrifice of expiation” (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2006). When dwelling physically among us, the Word incarnate fixed his eyes directly on those who followed him. Now, from the tabernacle and from heaven, he makes use of his disciples, of you and of me, to direct his merciful look upon every man and woman.

We always have to be thinking about the others, trying to bring them to God. But in the coming weeks, when we are also preparing for the approaching solemnity of St. Joseph, we have to redouble our apostolic zeal. We only need to consider what we see every day, in those closest to us and in the whole world, to discover the urgent need for Christ’s charity that exists everywhere. When confronting the violent episodes that we see in so many nations, we Christians cannot retaliate by committing other offenses or mistreating anyone. To confront the challenge of the problems of human coexistence, whether great or small, the solution consists in loving more, in loving better, in accord with St. Paul’s exhortation: “Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God...No, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (*Rom* 12:17-21).

St. Josemaría, from very early on, summarized this teaching of St. Paul in an incisive phrase, saying that we have to “drown evil in an abundance of good” (*Furrow*, no. 864). And he specified: “It is not a question of negative campaigns, or of being anti anything. On the contrary, we should live positively, full of optimism, with youthfulness, joy and peace. We should be understanding with everybody, with the followers of Christ and with those who abandon him, or do not know him at all.”

This attitude has nothing to do with passivity or defeatism: “understanding does not mean holding back, or remaining indifferent, but
being active” (*Ibid.*) As members of civil society, we Christians should defend our rights as citizens, and also the rights of others, with all the licit means at our disposal, without aggressiveness but without ceding or compromising in what affects the common good of individuals or nations. Now, when in many places a militant secularism is being paraded, it is especially important that those who recognize the natural moral law unite in defense of these values, whatever one’s personal beliefs.

Thanks be to God, in many places forces that were sleeping are awakening, and many people are leaving behind their individualism to take an active part in the great cultural and social battles of our time. How are you making use of your personal freedom? Are you taking part in these noble initiatives in accord with your possibilities? Are you trying to mobilize others, telling them that they cannot remain closed up in their shell, but that they have to make a decision to openly defend the rights of God and the inalienable rights of the human person?

This mobilization can be seen as a permanent strategy. At the same time, since it is a matter of fostering deep and lasting changes, personal commitment takes on vital importance here. In the heart of each person decisive battles for the betterment of society are waged, as the Gospel teaches us: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander” (*Mt* 15:19). St. Paul sets out a specific program, very much in harmony with the spirit of Lent: “Let love be genuine,” he writes, “hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality” (*Rom* 12:9-13).

It is a matter, in short, of carrying out a great sowing of charity in human hearts and in social structures. As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in his first encyclical, “love—*caritas*—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of
concrete love of neighbor is indispensable” (Deus Caritas Est, no. 28). We all need to feel this specific concern for those who live alongside us, a clear sign of true love for God; because “he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20).

St. Josemaría taught us that, for this concern to be upright and effective, we need to empty ourselves of our own ego, sincerely taking on as our own the concerns, joys and sufferings of our fellow men and women, and specifically of those closest to us by reason of a common vocation, family ties, profession, etc. Perhaps there will come to your lips the exclamation, “It's very difficult,” words that we find in Furrow. Recall St. Josemaría’s answer and try to put it into practice: “Listen, if you make an effort, with the grace of God that is enough. You will put your own interests to one side, you will serve others for God, and you will come to the aid of the Church in the field where the battles are being fought today: in the street, in the factory, in the workshop, in the university, in the office, in your own surroundings, amongst your family and friends” (Furrow, no. 14).

Pope Benedict XVI points out that, at the outset, one’s love is usually conditioned by motives such as one’s own enjoyment, self-fulfillment, or even personal advantage. Therefore it needs to be purified, and one must undertake “a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing” (Deus Caritas Est, no. 5). Only thus can the initial imperfect love become the love of a true self-giving, which forgets about itself because it is a reflection of Christ’s love for humanity. “When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form” (Ibid., no. 12). Saint Josemaría taught us to look at the Crucifix with piety, because “Jesus on the cross, with his heart overflowing with love for men, is such an eloquent commentary on the value of people and things that words only get in the way. Men, their happiness and their life, are so important that the very Son
of God gave himself to redeem and cleanse and raise them up” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 165).

As we approach the solemnity of St. Joseph, after having meditated on his sorrows and joys, let us consider the complete loyalty that we have to put into whatever we do. Ask our Father to engrave on each of our souls, the “psychological prejudice” of always thinking about God and the others, for we are never alone. Let us learn from the Holy Patriarch to serve joyfully, loving our Lord’s will and striving to live a refined charity with all souls.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, March 1, 2006

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**Homilies**

**On the Feast of St. Josemaria, St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome (June 26, 2006)**

*On the feast of St. Josemaria, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome*

My dear brothers and sisters:

1. *Ut in gratiarum semper actione maneamus*, may we always be giving thanks. *Deo omnis gloria*, to God be all the glory. These are two aspirations that inspired St. Josemaría, whose feast, which we celebrate today, invites us to follow the example of his ordinary life. Let us also give thanks to God because—as we pray in the Preface of the Mass—the whole Church is strengthened by the example of the saints; she is guided by their teaching and protected by their intercession,\[1\] which today we see in St. Josemaría.
As every year, I invite you to meditate on some aspects of his response to God that can help us to improve our own Christian behavior. Today I would like to speak about the love and veneration for the Church and the Roman Pontiff that was always evident in his life. This is a very suitable occasion to do so for two reasons: first, because we find ourselves at the beginning of a new pontificate, a moment always marked by great hopes and challenges. And second, because three days ago, on June 23rd, we celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of St. Josemaría’s arrival in the Eternal City, where he remained until his death, which occurred, as we know, on June 26, 1975.

His trip to Rome was not exempt from difficulties. The severe diabetes he was suffering from led the doctors to discourage him from even making the trip. In addition, communication between Spain and Italy was not easy during those years right after the end of the Second World War, and he was also confronted by an absolute lack of financial resources. Urged on by his apostolic zeal and his desire to fulfill God’s will, St. Josemaría undertook the trip, in spite of everything, at the suggestion of my beloved predecessor, Don Álvaro del Portillo, who had arrived in Rome several months earlier.

His biographers have described in detail the circumstances that led to his refusal to delay that trip. For us, as I said earlier, it is an occasion to meditate on an essential feature of Opus Dei’s founder, his passionate love for the Church and the Roman Pontiff, so evident during those days.

2. From the first years of his vocation, when still a young priest, St. Josemaría harbored an eager desire to visit Rome. He wrote in The Way:

“Catholic, Apostolic, Roman! I want you to be very Roman, ever anxious to make your ‘pilgrimage’ to Rome, *videre Petrum*—to see Peter.”[2] In one of the first documents on the spirit of Opus Dei, dated 1934, one can read these words: “We have to give all the glory to God. He wishes this: *gloriam meam alteri non dabo*, I will not give my glory to another (Is 42:8). And therefore we want Christ to reign, because *per ipsum, et cum ipso, et in ipso, est tibi Deo Patri Omnipotenti in unitate Spiritus Sancti omnis honor et gloria*; through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever. And a requirement
of his glory and his reign is that all, with Peter, go to Jesus through Mary.”[3]

At times, he mentioned to us some details regarding his veneration for the Holy Father, dating from the very first years of the Work. For example, whenever he prayed the rosary, while still living in Madrid, he would end it with a spiritual communion, imagining that he was receiving the Sacred Host from the hands of the Pope, in the Holy Father’s private chapel. These small human devices helped him to grow in love for the Church, founded by Christ on the Prince of the Apostles, and to foster a closer union, both in his sentiments and deeds, with Peter’s successor.

We can thus easily imagine St. Josemaría’s ardent emotion when he arrived in Rome in that now distant 1946. On entering the city by the Via Aurelia, a moment comes when one can see for the first time the cupola of St. Peter’s Basilica. The interior fervor of the Founder of Opus Dei led him to pray a Creed, savoring the words one by one, as a profession of the faith for which Simon Peter and so many other men and women had offered, in this city, the supreme witness of martyrdom in Christianity’s first centuries.

Upon reaching the Eternal City, St. Josemaría and those accompanying him went to the Piazza della Città Leonina, close to the Vatican walls, where the first center of Opus Dei in Rome was temporarily located. When the others retired for the evening, St. Josemaría stayed out on a small terrace that fronted on the pontifical apartment. Thanks to the lights visible in the apartment, he was able to follow the work of the successor to Peter, who at that time was Pope Pius XII. Those circumstances were for our Father another opportunity to intensify his close union with the Roman Pontiff. When all the lights were turned off, he remained recollected in prayer until sunrise. That’s how he spent his first night in Rome.

We should try to draw practical consequences from this. We have been living, perhaps for a long time, in this city that is the seat of the Pope. We have, therefore, greater facility to see Peter, perhaps taking part in an audience or ceremony, and to be closely united to him and his intentions each day. Therefore I ask myself and I ask you: do we remember to pray every day for Benedict XVI and to offer for him and his universal mission
our work and some small mortification during the day? Do we strive to get to know his teachings and to put them into practice and pass them on to others?

Remember what Benedict XVI asked of all Catholics in his first moments as Peter’s successor. In the Mass for the initiation of his pontificate, he asked us three times to accompany him with our prayer. I remind you of his words: “Pray for me, that I may learn to love the Lord more and more. Pray for me, that I may learn to love his flock more and more—in other words, you, the holy Church, each one of you and all of you together. Pray for me, that I may not flee for fear of the wolves. Let us pray for one another, that the Lord will carry us and that we will learn to carry one another.”[4]

3. St. Josemaría loved the Church passionately. He saw the Church, in the words of St. Paul and following the teaching of the Magisterium, in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.[5] He has left us a shining example of how to distinguish between the sanctity of the Church and the faults of her members on earth. He was not scandalized by the errors of Christians, which are always personal and which cannot be attributed—as such, in a generic way—to the Church, bishops, priests, or the people of God as a whole. On the contrary, if ever he witnessed, or heard anyone talking about, the reprehensible conduct of a member of the Church, this only led him to increase his faith in the Holy Spirit and in the Church. “It would be a sign of very little maturity,” he wrote, “if, in view of the defects and miseries in any of those who belong to the Church (no matter how high they may be placed by virtue of their function), anyone should feel his faith in the Church and in Christ lessened. The Church is not governed by Peter, nor by John, nor by Paul; she is governed by the Holy Spirit, and the Lord has promised that he will remain at her side always, to the close of the age (Mt 28:20).”[6]

As the Servant of God Bishop Alvaro del Portillo told us, and as I also was a witness to, St. Josemaría would often go to pray at the Vatican Basilica. For many years he did so almost every day. In front of the Basilica and the Vatican palaces, he would recite the Apostles Creed, adding a few words to it. For example, when he came to the phrase “I believe in the
Holy Spirit, in the Holy Catholic Church,” he would always repeat three times: “I believe in my mother the Roman Church, a pesar de los pesares, ‘in spite of everything.’” On one occasion he thought it useful to tell Cardinal Tardini, who was then Vatican Secretary of State, about this devotion of his. When the Cardinal asked what he meant by “a pesar de los pesares,” St. Josemaría replied with a smile, “Your personal mistakes, your Eminence, your personal mistakes and mine.”[7]

My brothers and sisters! Let us ask God our Father to grant us the deep faith and love for the Church that St. Josemaría had. He assured us with striking words that he was ready to bite off his tongue and spit it out before speaking about others’ defects or faults. We too should avoid speaking badly of others. And even more so when it concerns the Church, her representatives or institutions. May our tongue never give voice to a single word of criticism or gossip! Never!

On the contrary, it is our task to defend our Mother from the attacks she receives, and not remain quiet out of human respects or fear. Let us learn to calmly explain the truth that may have been twisted without raising our voice, without any lack of respect for people. But to do so one needs to be well formed, to know the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, or at least the *Compendium* that was published last year. And this knowledge should be well grounded in a life of prayer fed by personal meditation and by frequenting the sacraments. Only thus will we be in a position to carry out the heartfelt recommendation the Pope made a few days ago to the lay faithful especially: “I ask you to collaborate even more, very much more, in the Pope’s universal apostolic ministry, opening doors to Christ.”[8]

As the venerable Servant of God John Paul II told us, untiringly opening the doors to Christ, those of our own heart and of the hearts of others, is a task that falls to all Catholics. Our apostolate should encompass people who are close to us and those who are further away, because everyone has the right to know Christ. Indeed, “the Church must never be satisfied with all those she has reached at a certain point and say that others are fine as they are: Muslims, Hindus and so forth. The Church can never retreat comfortably within the limits of her own environment. She is charged with a universal solicitude; she must be concerned with and for all mankind.”[9]
These are the intentions that we place today in the hands of our Lady, Mother of the Church and our Mother, through the intercession of St. Josemaría. May she make them bear fruit in our lives and in our daily work. Amen.


[4] Benedict XVI, Homily at the initiation of his pontificate, April 24, 2005


On the anniversary of the dedication of a square to St. Josemaria, Cathedral of Chieti (February 12, 2006)

*On the anniversary of the dedication of a plaza to St. Josemaria, Cathedral of Chieti, Italy*

My dear brothers and sisters:

I am deeply grateful to God for having given me the possibility of celebrating this Sunday Liturgy with all of you. I also thank God for the affection that you have shown towards St. Josemaría to whom you wished to dedicate a plaza of your city, a gesture for which I thank the civil and religious authorities and all of the citizens of Chieti.
The Liturgy of the Word for this sixth Sunday of ordinary time helps us to go deeply into some of the central aspects of our Christian faith. In the first reading, taken from the Book of Leviticus, we are shown, in all of its ugliness, the miserable condition of the leper. The one suffering from this disease had to cry, “Unclean, unclean!” whenever he met anyone, and he was forced to live far from the community. Leprosy, in its dramatic expressiveness, is a figure of a much graver evil: sin, the one really deadly sickness for the soul.

For this reason, dear brothers and sisters, the first grace that I ask of God, for me and for each of you, is that of truly understanding the malice of sin. This is a theme that our Holy Father Benedict XVI invites us to confront with courage. At times we run the risk of thinking, the Pope teaches us, that “a person who does not sin is, basically, boring; that something is missing in his life.” On the contrary, it is precisely sin which is the cause of that boredom which deprives our life of meaning, which gives rise to separation and sadness, and which makes us egoists and incapable of carrying out actions which have a human and divine value. With the grace of God, on the other hand, we can discover, once more in the words of the Holy Father, that “only the person who entrusts himself totally to God finds true freedom, the great, creative immensity of the freedom of good” (Homily, December 8, 2005).

“I have acknowledged my sins,” we recited in the responsorial psalm, “my guilt I did not hide. I said: ‘I will confess my offence to the Lord.’ And you, Lord, have forgiven the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 31). Jesus, with his passion and death, with his Blood shed for love of us, has blotted out the malice of our sin—mine and yours; sin is always personal. He has opened wide the portals of forgiveness, of his friendship, making us rise from our prostration. Because of this we can exclaim, in the words of the Psalm, “You fill me, Lord, with the joy of salvation” (Ibid.). A true, deep happiness which nothing of the world can give. A happiness which, born of the soul, is reflected upon every aspect of our life. St. Josemaría loved the Sacrament of Reconciliation to such a point that he called it “the Sacrament of Joy.” Especially in his last years on earth, he was not afraid to admit—even in the presence of the numerous and varied public that attended his catechetical gatherings—the joyful experience of his own
confession, which he made each week. I have had the opportunity of noting how the beloved Pastor of this diocese, in a recent letter to you about this sacrament, gave a moving testimony to this experience, when he spoke of a joy which “arises from feeling myself loved in a new way by God each time that I attain his forgiveness through the priest, who gives this to me in God’s name” (Bruno Forte, Confessarsi, perché? A letter for the pastoral year 2005—2006, no. 2).

Yes, it is precisely through his forgiveness that God shows his merciful love to us. We have just heard it in the Gospel which the Liturgy of today places before us. We should try to contemplate the scenes of the life of Jesus following the advice of St. Josemaría, that is, living them as though one of those present (cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, The Forge, no. 8). If we approach him as did the leper, asking forgiveness with sincere repentance, we will see how Jesus is moved with compassion for each of us and will say the same words to us: “Of course I want to. Be cured” (Mk 1:41). Jesus has come to earth above all to save that which was lost, and also for a single sinner who is converted there is great joy among the angels of God (cf. Lk 15:10). Each time that we return to our Father’s house in the Sacrament of Penance, we discover “the face of a God who knows better than anyone our human condition and who approaches us with the most tender love” (Bruno Forte, Confessarsi, perché? A letter for the pastoral year 2005—2006, no. 2), as your Archbishop recalled in the pastoral letter already cited.

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). Let us try to put into practice this exhortation of St. Paul that we heard in the second reading. We have all been called to meet our Lord nel bel mezzo della strada, in our everyday life, in the plazas and streets of your city in work and in rest, in health and in sickness. I like to think that St. Josemaría has made himself your traveling companion, on your habitual paths, in this common road towards the house of the Father. A road in which, as the Pope reminded us at the beginning of his Pontificate, “we are not alone, we are surrounded, led and guided by the friends of God” (Homily of the Mass for the initiation of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome, April 24, 2005), by the saints who are in heaven.
Every instant of our life, in fact, can have an eternal value, if we try to fill it with love: with love of God, of those we encounter, and of all humanity.

A sincere joy cannot be hidden. It is shared, in our everyday life with others, beginning with our loved ones, our families and by our friends and colleagues. May the family, “the domestic Church,” become each day more a place of peace, of forgiveness, of reconciliation. Let us know how to free ourselves from all rancor, envy, and jealousy, with concrete and deeply felt gestures of reciprocal forgiveness. And let us learn to approach the sacrament of joy with greater frequency and with a more contrite spirit, especially during the Lenten season which is now so close.

I don’t want to end these words without imploring, before this beloved community, for the alms that I consider most precious: the alms of your prayer, for me and for each of the faithful of the flock of Opus Dei which God has entrusted to me so that they know each day how to serve the Church with humility and joy, as the Church wishes to be served.

I return, together with each of you, to the intercession of our Lady, the mother of God and our Mother. If we approach her, if we frequent her, she will teach us to grow in love of God and to behave among ourselves as good sisters and brothers, as apostles always looking for opportunities to lead souls to God. Amen

At the Mass in suffrage for the soul of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (March 23, 2006)

At the Mass in suffrage for the soul of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome

1. Dear brothers and sisters.

We are commemorating today the twelfth anniversary of the death of the Servant of God, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. In offering Holy Mass in suffrage for his soul, we are fulfilling a debt of Christian charity, although
we are convinced that he is already enjoying eternal bliss. Many people, indeed, throughout the world, go to his intercession in a private way, confident of being heard by our Lord through his intercession.

Today’s anniversary is for us an invitation to look towards the definitive goal of our life. The liturgy recalls this to us, asking us to listen to the cry of Job: *For I know that my redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth.*[1] This is a cry of confidence and of victory. In the midst of his sufferings, Job has faith in the resurrection of the body and of eternal life; for this reason he adds: *and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.*[2]

This biblical passage reminds us of one of the fundamental truths of the faith: after death, if we have been faithful to the demands of our Christian vocation, there awaits us eternal happiness, which comes from the contemplation of God and participation in the divine life. And, at the end of time, when our Lord returns to earth in glory, we also await the resurrection of the flesh.

In the second reading, St. Paul shows us the basis for our hope: the fact that we have been redeemed by Christ and made children of God through the action of the Paraclete. *For all who are led by the Spirit of God, he teaches us, are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship, by which we cry, “Abba, Father.”*[3]

United to Christ, we Christians need have no fear of anything: with him we are always victorious. *Neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate s from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*[4]

2. The real evil, which we should absolutely flee, is sin. For this reason, as the Pope says, “The true believer, aware of being a sinner, aspires with his whole self—spirit, heart and body—to divine forgiveness, as to a new creation that can restore joy and hope to him.”[5]

This is the fundamental message of Lent. As this liturgical period goes on, there should grow in us the desire for purification. Lent, in effect,
recalls to us that our earthly life is a time of struggle. *Militia est vita hominis super terram*[^6^] “It is a spiritual battle waged against sin and finally, against Satan. It is a struggle that involves the whole of the person and demands attentive and constant watchfulness.”[^7^]

A basic weapon in this struggle is the Sacrament of Penance, instituted by Christ for the remission of sins. To help her children conquer Satan is the reason why the Church has issued the precept of going to sacramental confession and the Eucharist at least once a year at Easter time.

I recall the insistence of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, who followed in the footsteps of St. Josemaría, in encouraging the practice of confession. To live in God’s grace is, in fact the indispensable presupposition for cultivating interior life. For this reason Don Álvaro urged us to help others to receive this sacrament. “Expend a lot of patience on the people you deal with,” he told us, “without being discouraged when they do not respond. Dedicate time to them, love them truly, and they will end up surrendering themselves to God’s love which they will discover in your conduct. And don’t forget that every step that remains requires us to help them more.”[^8^]

I also want to encourage you to do the same. Always, but especially if it is a matter of people who find themselves far from the faith, this apostolate should be preceded, accompanied, and followed by prayer and mortification. And do not be afraid to insist. After the first time they go to confession, perhaps after a long time away from it, it will be necessary to encourage them again—always delicately, with a great respect for their conscience, but with daring—until they understand that, to be a good Catholic, it is necessary to have a solid and constant sacramental life. You can be sure that in this way you will be doing them the greatest of favors.

3. In addition to the invitation to flee from sin, Lent reminds us that we have to approach our Lord with a more continual prayer, a more intense penance, a more efficacious concern for the spiritual and material good of others.

A life of prayer, in the first place. To love God we have to know him. And the path that leads to God is Jesus Christ, as he himself taught us: *ego sum via et veritas et vita,*[^9^] I am the way, the truth and the life. And also in today’s Gospel: *no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the
Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.\[10\] I feel a need to tell you about an incident: Shortly before giving his soul to God, our beloved Don Álvaro was able to go to Gethsemani, where he prayed with all mankind, united to the prayer of Christ. The moments that he spent there impressed many people who were able to see his recollection. We overcame human respect: although we did not want to attract attention, it’s good that others see that Catholics pray.

Let’s try, then, to grow in intimacy with God, frequenting Jesus lovingly in the Eucharist and in personal prayer. “Bread and the word!” wrote St. Josemaría. “The Host and prayer. If not, you will not live a supernatural life.” We will fulfill these resolutions more easily if we dedicate some time each day to converse personally with our Lord, if we frequent Holy Mass more often during the week—would that it were every day—if we had the custom of making a brief examination of conscience at night, before going to bed.

In second place a spirit of sacrifice. Today many people are scandalized by these words—mortification, penance—and make every possible effort to flee, uselessly, from every kind of pain. They don’t realize that suffering—aside from being inevitable as long as we live on earth—since it has been redeemed by Christ on the Cross, can become a means of purification, of spiritual growth. “The great Christian revolution has been to convert pain into fruitful suffering and to turn a bad thing into something good. We have deprived the devil of this weapon; and with it we can conquer eternity.”\[11\]

Finally, Lent invites us to practice the spiritual and corporal works of charity with greater generosity. This theme was recently dealt with by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical Deus Caritas Est, which I invite you to reread. In those pages, among other things, the Holy Father emphasized the intimate relationship existing between love of God and love of neighbor. “It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God.... Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ.”\[12\] On the contrary, “if I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything
more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of
God."[13]

In the light of these considerations, let us examine whether our
relationship with those persons whom we meet most frequently—in our
family, in the surroundings of work—are animated by a spirit of service,
that is to say by a spirit that does not seek our own interest but the good of
the others, thus imitating the Son of Man, who came not to be served but to
serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."[14] I like to recall that since
that far away 1948 our beloved Don Álvaro had occasion to travel all over
Italy carrying out a fruitful apostolate in various cities. He was not able to
count on any material resources, but he loved our Lord and souls; he left us
a good example for our daily life.

Feeling the nearness of Mary, the Refuge of Sinners, Help of
Christians, Mother of the Church, let us formulate a resolution to travel
what remains of Lent with renewed effort. This would be a means of
honoring the memory of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo on the anniversary of
his dies natalis. Amen.

no.18.
At the Mass "In cena Domini," Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 13, 2006)

At the Mass In Coena

Domini, Prelatic Church of

Our Lady of Peace, Rome

1. Desiderio desideravi hoc Pascha manducare vobiscum! “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you!” These words are addressed to the apostles and, through them, to the whole Church, to us, as we recall those ineffable moments that we are commemorating in the solemnity of the Paschal Triduum.

Each of Jesus’ words and gestures—words and gestures of God—is an invitation with multiple facets requiring a full response from us, because he has given himself totally for us. The Master did not forget for a moment his mission as Redeemer. All of his actions, thoughts, words and prayers, and also his time of work and rest in Nazareth, and later his time with his disciples, were oriented towards the Sacrifice of the Cross, which becomes present for mankind at the celebration of Holy Mass. Through the grace that he gained for us, and which he constantly confers on us, we can make our life “essentially Eucharistic,” as St. Josemaría said.

The essence, as we well know, is what defines every reality. Therefore, with the help that reaches us from Heaven, what an obligation we have to unite our actions to the Eucharist! Yes, we have to make an effort to stay close to the Blessed Sacrament. We have to aspire to what St. Thomas Aquinas asked for in the hymn Adoro te devote: “praesta meae menti de te vivere!” Lord, grant that I not be able to live without you.
2. The possibility of acting with Christ, in Christ, and for Christ should fill us with joy and impel us to improve our behavior every day. We have the certainty that, although at times this joyful gift requires struggle—a hard struggle—there is no greater good here on earth than to walk in friendship with God.

In the Cenacle, during the priestly prayer at the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus shows us clearly that he is the Emmanuel, God with us, and he tells us that the friendship he offers us is precisely to share in his intimacy with the Father. Those men who listened to him were weak, as are we. The narrative gives us consolation and strength to persevere in the good: Jesus does not exclude anyone. Only the one whose heart is hardened, who does not want to change, is capable of closing his soul, of becoming a traitor.

Let us resolve to have frequent and more diligent recourse to the Eucharist—would that it were every day!—convinced that we are the beneficiaries. Let us strive not to distance ourselves from him, first of all by our daily struggle to reject sin, shunning the attitude of the false friend who abandons the one who loves him, to the point of giving his life for him.

3. From the first moment of his Pontificate, Benedict XVI has insisted on the centrality of the Eucharist in the Church, and in the conduct of each of the Church’s children. Among many other suggestions, he has reminded us of the determination of those early Christian martyrs, who when faced with misunderstanding and threats affirmed without hesitation: *sine Dominico non possumus!* We cannot live without meeting on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist!

Those men and women responded in this way to a prohibition of celebrating the Lord’s day. We, who also know how much God loves us, have to apply that expression to our daily life. I ask you sincerely to incorporate into your daily schedule attendance at Mass and reception of the Eucharist.

We must not forget that today too there are many tyrants who malevolently oppose our taking advantage of the treasure of the Eucharist. And they may even be within us, in the form of comfort seeking, pride, sensuality, and the scourge of lukewarm conduct.
Or perhaps we encounter them in the environment around us, with the refusal to recognize that the creature without God is nothing and less than nothing. Let us react with joyful courage, never allowing human respects to overpower us or impede us from giving witness to our faith.

4. Therefore, although you may find obstacles around you (our Lord too encountered them, and he told us that a disciple is not above his Master), also today it happens that many people, on seeing Christian conduct, experience the health-bringing crisis of a conversion. Yes, that so many men and women in the world return to the faith, or at least begin along this path, depends on our own Eucharistic piety.

Pope John Paul II said that in the Eucharist, with the real presence of Christ’s Body and Blood, one finds the fragrance of our Lady, who, by the work of the Holy Spirit, gave Body and Blood to our Redeemer. Let us turn to the intercession of Mary to become Eucharistic souls.

At the Easter Vigil Mass, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 15, 2006)

At the Easter Vigil Mass
in the Prelatic Church of
Our Lady of Peace, Rome

1. My dear sisters and daughters

Yesterday we assisted at the passion and death of our Lord. The Offices of Good Friday end by symbolizing the burial of Christ: the bare altar, without altar cloths or candlesticks, reminds us that Jesus is now lying in the tomb. The apostles and holy women believe that all has ended; their adventure alongside Christ, who has enkindled so much light in their souls, seems to be over. An immense darkness fills the whole world. This is
symbolized by today’s ceremony, which begins with all the lights turned off.

The Paschal Vigil is the Church’s most solemn liturgical ceremony. Let us try to stay close to Mary as we take part. In her the light of faith and hope was never extinguished; never for a moment did she doubt that her Son’s promise would be fulfilled: “I shall rise on the third day.” Mary alone remembers, prays, hopes and tries to prevent the disciples from becoming discouraged and being dispersed. We know that Christ arose and that by his Resurrection he definitively defeated sin, the devil and death. God could not permit the body of his Son to see corruption, and he united it once again with his soul so as to never again die. This is the great announcement that the Church makes today to the whole world: Christ has risen! “Life has overcome death!” as St. Josemaria joyfully expressed it.

He has truly risen, and he has risen for us, to give us immortal life, of which we already have a foretaste here. Christ’s Resurrection is a pledge of our own. Everything comes from him. We saw this visibly symbolized in the procession of the paschal candle. In the darkness, the paschal candle was suddenly lit, representing Christ, the true light of the world. And this light was spread to all the others, until the Church was filled with light.

2. What we have just seen expressed symbolically in the liturgical signs, has been truly realized in each of us by our baptism. Let us meditate on St. Paul’s words: “All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death…We were buried therefore with him…so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4). St. Thomas says that in baptism Christ’s redemptive merits are applied to us as though each of us had been crucified and buried with him. How grateful we should be for this immense gift!

But we truly have to lead a new life, as St. Paul also reminds us. A new life that consists in showing ourselves worthy to be called Christians, that is to say, women and men who have faith in Christ and who strive to become as much like him as possible. To assist us, he has given us the sacraments, which perfect Christ’s image in us, especially the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. But on our part personal struggle is required, not only
against everything that can separate us from God, but also in order to grow more and more closely identified with Jesus Christ.

3. Let us ask ourselves courageously: where do I have to say no, and where do I need to say yes, in order to fulfill the will of God the Father and become more like Jesus? Grace, which is light for the intellect and strength for the will, is not lacking to us. Besides, we can rely on the intercession of our Lady and all the saints in heaven, especially St. Josemaría, to whom we owe the initiative of these Easter gatherings: our Father will obtain these graces for us with special abundance. And we can also go to the Servant of God, John Paul II, who so strongly encouraged these Roman reunions. He sees us and is following us from the window of heaven, as the present Pope said when still a Cardinal, in the funeral Mass last year.

We can’t seek compromises, like a person trying to haggle over the price of something of infinite value. What is at stake is the sanctity to which we are all personally called. If Christ did not hold back a drop of his Blood for each of us, how can we allow room for selfish calculations?

But it is not enough that you and I look after our own spiritual life. We are all called to be other Christs, Christ himself, and the whole purpose of Christ’s life was the salvation of the world. “I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!” (Lk 12:49). This fire is the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier of souls, who now dwells in the heart of the Church. But he dwells there so that we can transmit him to others. We have to be apostolic. A person who fails to set fire to his surroundings, ends up having his own fire die out.

4. In today’s Gospel the women, after seeing the empty sepulcher, are told by the angel to communicate the good news to the disciples. Jesus himself goes forth to meet them and tells them: “go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” They are the first to announce the good news of the Resurrection, the first link in a chain that should never be interrupted.

You and I, don’t doubt it, have received the same mission. During these days in Rome it has resounded with new force in our ears. The Vicar of Christ himself has insisted in one way or another that we are to follow Christ closely, because he has called us to be the salt of the earth and light
of the world. Don’t you see what a marvelous adventure this is, even humanly speaking? It will become a reality through the power of the Holy Spirit and your apostolic zeal.

Everywhere there are thousands and thousands of people, young and old, who have never heard this announcement. They are waiting to hear it from your lips, to see it reflected in your conduct The Founder of the Work was always moved by that passage in St. John’s Gospel, when Jesus approached a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, beside the pool of Bethsaida. Our Lord asked him: Do you want to be cured? And the sick man answered: Lord, I don’t have anyone who can help me get into the pool when the waters are agitated; when I arrive, someone has gotten there before me.... “I don’t have a person at my side who can give me a push....” Perhaps because we are cowards and let ourselves be influenced by human respects; or lukewarm people without the fire of Christ in their heart. It is a great responsibility: “What a pity,” wrote St. Josemaria, “if Jesus does not find in you the man or the woman he expects” (The Forge, 168).

Think about it, and make specific resolutions. Who can you help to come closer to Jesus, when you return to your own country? Which of your companions, or friends, or relatives, can you have a personal conversation with, opening up spiritual horizons? Who can you invite to a retreat, or help to make a good confession? Surely if you go down the list of people you know, you will find someone, perhaps a number of people, for whom you could have prayed more, and to whom you have never seriously spoken about the need to be close to God.

Let us ask our Lady, Queen of Apostles, that through her intercession the resolutions from these days may yield fruit in our lives: resolutions to follow Jesus very closely, to be faithful to our Christian commitments, and to bring many other souls close to Christ. Amen.

Torna ai contenuti
At the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature, St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome (May 27, 2006)

My dear brothers and sisters, my dear ordinands:

The fact that the priestly ordination of thirty-four faithful of the Prelature coincides with the solemnity of the Ascension illuminates in a special way some aspects of your future ministry, and also touches upon the life of all the faithful in the Church. I would like to speak especially about the Eucharist, about preaching, and about the working of divine mercy.

1. “As they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). These words from the first reading relate the mystery of our Lord’s Ascension. Jesus has left them, but his disciples can’t quite convince themselves of this fact. The Acts of the Apostles continues: “they were gazing into heaven as he went” (Acts 1:10). At first, the Ascension meant for the disciples that Jesus had disappeared, that he was no longer physically with them.

At the same time we know that our Lord had promised, as Matthew writes in his Gospel: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). Right here we can see a link between our Lord’s Ascension and today’s celebration, in connection with the mystery of Christ’s absence and at the same time permanent presence in the Church. This ceremony is, in fact, simultaneously the celebration of the Eucharist and your priestly ordination, my sons. Jesus has gone away, it is true, but he remains with us in a unique, ineffable, real way. He is really and substantially present in the Eucharist, and this is possible thanks to the gift of the ministerial priesthood which you are about to receive. Immediately after your ordination, in this Mass, you will celebrate the Holy Sacrifice with me. Acting in persona Christi capitis Ecclesiae (in the person of Christ, head of the Church), we will repeat the words of the institution of the Eucharist:
“This is my Body,” “this is the chalice of my Blood.” Jesus will descend upon the altar. In this supreme act of worship to God the Father, the paschal mystery will be made present for the salvation of the world.

Each day Jesus comes to us in the Holy Eucharist. Benedict XVI said that Jesus “gives himself through our hands, he gives himself to us. For this reason the Holy Eucharist, in which the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross remains continually present, truly present among us, is rightly at the center of priestly life. And with this as our starting point, we also learn what celebrating the Eucharist properly means: it is an encounter with the Lord, who strips himself of his divine glory for our sake, allows himself to be humiliated to the point of death on the Cross and thus gives himself to each one of us.”[1] And the Pope further remarks: “The Eucharist must become for us a school of life in which we learn to give our lives. One’s life is given not only at the moment of death, and not only in the manner of martyrdom. We must give it day by day…giving life, not taking it. It is in this very way that we experience freedom.”[2]

This experience teaches us what love means, a true love, and therefore a love that lasts forever. You yourselves, deacons now, will be sacerdotes in aeternum, priests forever! I am certain that you can count on the prayers of everyone present, not only for each one of you, but also for seminarians and all those God wants to call to the ministerial priesthood. This is an intention that should be present in every Christian heart.

2. On that momentous day, when he was about to leave, Jesus said to his disciples: “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). To preach and proclaim the good news of salvation will from now on be your task, although everyone is called upon to do the same. You have to transmit Christ’s teachings faithfully, also by your behavior. These teachings fill the soul with joy and peace. Therefore you can count on the infusion of the Spirit, to announce to all mankind that they have been called to love God and other men and women in their daily lives and professional work. As St. Josemaría tirelessly repeated, with a special light from God: all human realities can be turned into an act of love for God. Thus, by uniting work and prayer, we become divinized. This too is a lesson we learn from our Lord’s Ascension. In the opening prayer we read: “through the glorious Ascension of your Son, our humanity is
Yes, Christ’s created humanity now enjoys the glory of heaven, and therefore our humanity too is already reaping the benefits of this glory.

Preaching echoes, in a certain way, the angels’ invitation to the apostles: we mustn’t remain inactive, looking up towards heaven as though something were about to happen. Rather we should direct our attention to the Eucharist and fall on our knees to adore our God, Jesus Christ, present under the appearance of bread. My sons, that is what you should do: adore and invite others to adore, also with one’s body, the Most Blessed Sacrament, mystery of faith and love. Thus your preaching will have its source in the reality of the Eucharist and prayer, that is, in personal and intimate contact with Jesus Christ.

I would like to greet now with great affection the families of my deacon sons, especially their parents: your sons owe their vocation to you! I pray for those who have not been able to be here. I unite myself to your deep emotion when, on the altar, each new priest will make present the paschal mystery, placing you on the paten, next to Jesus who offers himself to his Father.

3. Today’s Gospel also contains words that might strike us as mysterious. The evangelist St. Mark says: “The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mk 16:19). What does this final statement mean? It simply seeks to remind us that Jesus, that Christ the King, governs the world at the right hand of the Father. In other words, it means that God’s providence can never fail.

I said earlier that we are called to adore, and we cannot forget that it is the Holy Spirit himself who leads us to pray. God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, never leaves us, never abandons us at any moment. The Word of God, Jesus Christ, has shown us God’s loving fatherhood. It is everyone’s duty, and especially that of priests, to reflect this fatherhood of God in the exercise of spiritual direction, and in the case of priests, also through the administration of the sacrament of Penance. In this way priests will give hope to souls. They will listen patiently to everyone, knowing that each person is unique before God: each is a son or daughter of God.
Every soul, St. Josemaría joyfully repeated, is worth all the blood of Christ.[4] Through this Blood which redeemed us, our sins are forgiven. Forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance is a manifestation of God’s merciful goodness, which we should let everyone know about. These are the true wonders that so many people daily hope for from you, my dear ordinands: your availability to administer the sacrament of reconciliation, which St. Josemaría called “the sacrament of joy.” Thus you will help many people to carry out, day by day, little interior “ascensions.” Ascensions that normally take place in one’s family life, in work, in the world that we love as the place of our encounter with God, as the Founder of Opus Dei taught. We will attain little by little the “serene confidence” that someday we will be with Christ in our eternal dwelling place, as we say in the Preface. And there we will be in “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23), that is, in the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

It is clear that our Lord’s Ascension is expressed in his presence in the Eucharist, in the preaching of the Gospel by the priest and in the merciful gestures he carries out. The Church is the prolongation of Jesus’ presence in time. In communion with his Body, participating in the Holy Spirit, united to the Holy Father Benedict XVI, to the Cardinal Vicar of Rome and to all the bishops, we form the Church of Christ, called to reconcile the world with God. As St. Cyril of Alexandria wrote, the eternal Word confers upon men “his Spirit; he grants them every form of holiness—affinity and familial relationship to his nature and that of the Father.”[5] And St. Josemaría never failed to stress with great joy that thus we are “brothers of God and heirs to his glory.”[6] It is clear that we owe this incomparable treasure also to our Lady’s fiat: “be it done unto me according to your word.” During these days as we prepare once again to celebrate the solemnity of Pentecost, we will find certainly ourselves close to Mary. May our Lady watch over us, as the Seat of Wisdom, in the glory of her Son. Amen.


[2] Ibid.


Addresses

At the commemorative ceremony honoring St. Josemaria, Chieti (February 12, 2006)

Commemorative ceremony in honor of St. Josemaria

From the day of his departure for heaven, on June 26, 1975, devotion to St. Josemaría has spread rapidly throughout the world, even to countries where no faithful of Opus Dei are living. The accounts of favors received, both spiritual (conversions, returns to the sacraments) and material (cures, etc.), amount to hundreds of thousands, both before and after his canonization. This is a tangible sign that the message of sanctifying one’s ordinary life has taken root in the most varied and geographically distant environments, among persons of all ages and social and professional situations.

Seeking God in daily life

St. Josemaría was first of all a teacher of Christian life—a priest who taught by his word and example, by his daily conduct. He was called “the saint of the ordinary” by the unforgettable John Paul II (address on the day following his canonization, October 7, 2002). St. Josemaría’s teaching anticipated, as early as 1928, some of the central teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

First of all, the proclamation of the universal call to holiness: “all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love” says the Dogmatic Constitution Lumen
Gentium (no. 40). St. Josemaría wrote: “Your duty is to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you. Who thinks that this task is only for priests and religious? To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: ‘Be ye perfect, as my heavenly Father is perfect’ (The Way, no. 291).

St. Josemaría insisted that, if all are called to the fullness of love, we can’t consider only certain human activities as privileged channels, special paths to holiness. If we did that, the religious sphere would be separated from everyday life. No, all earthly activities are a path to encounter God, the place and material for our sanctification. It is our daily life that should be filled with God: “A Christian is no Tartarin of Tarascon, a literary character bent on hunting lions in the corridors of his home, where they were not to be found. I always speak about real daily life, about the sanctification of work, of family bonds, of friendships. If we aren’t Christian in these things, where will we be Christian? The pleasant smell of incense comes from some small, hidden grains of incense placed upon the burning charcoal. Likewise is the ‘aroma of Christ’ noticed among men—not in a sudden burst of flame, but in the constant red-hot embers of virtues such as justice, loyalty, faithfulness, understanding, generosity and cheerfulness” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 36).

He saw each of the faithful as having the duty to give testimony that daily life can be filled with God, with the living presence of God incarnate. “My Father is working still,” says Jesus in St. John’s Gospel (5:17). Commenting on the message of the Founder of Opus Dei, in an article published at the time of his canonization, the then Cardinal Ratzinger observed that still today “there are those who think that after creation, God ‘withdrew’ and took no further interest in our daily affairs. To this way of thinking, God can no longer enter the fabric of our daily lives. But we have a denial of this in Jesus’ words. A man open to God’s presence realizes that God is always working and is still working today” (L’Osservatore Romano, October 6, 2002).

Here is the core of the spirit of Opus Dei: leaving space for God, who wants to fill our lives and all our days with himself, with the charity of Christ. Letting him work in us, assisting his action. Here we find a synthesis of the message that St. Josemaría preached. “It is a message,” emphasized Cardinal Ratzinger in the article just cited, “that helps to
overcome what can be considered the great temptation of our time: the claim that after the ‘big bang’ God withdrew from history. God’s action did not stop with the ‘big bang’ but continues in time, both in the world of nature and in the human world” (**Ibid**.). A Christian, in other words, is responsible for reminding the world, through his daily work, that Christ has not separated himself from the world. He does not live in a far off dimension in glory, completely separate from, indifferent to human events.

**Crossing the Abruzzi region**

St. Josemaría’s reflections and conversations converged on these themes also during the many apostolic trips that I had the privilege to accompany him on. There come to my mind now so many trips by car across the Abruzzi region. And in particular some stops in Chieti, for example, when returning to Rome from Loreto.

His desire to see a stable presence of the spirit of the Work in the Abruzzi region and to guarantee its fruitfulness and its expansion from here to other places led him, helped by the insistence of some cooperators of Opus Dei from this area, to begin in the village of San Felice d’Ocre, near L’Aquila, an international conference center for teachers and university students, both men and women, from all over the world. The center, called Tor d’Aveia, began its activities in the summer of 1967. That year he spent the whole month of August in the nearby town of Gagliano Aterno, so that he could frequently visit those taking part in the study seminars and encourage them to make Christ present in and through their professional activity. He returned to San Felice the following year to consecrate an altar, and also later, in 1971.

I have a very vivid memory of those frequent “incursions” during the summer of 1967—those conversations in the shade of the pines during which St. Josemaría shared with us his own spiritual experience and taught us to live on earth a life rich in human significance and in divine perspectives. A group of women of Opus Dei was also living in San Felice d’Ocre who dedicated themselves to the domestic administration of the center. St. Josemaría advised them to develop friendships with the people of the village and other nearby towns, bringing them the Christian witness
of their own work: “With your charity, with your service, with your availability to all, you will leave a lasting impression on souls.”

And while he traveled around the region, he sowed the highways with Hail Mary’s, praying for everyone he passed on the road and entrusting to our Lady’s intercession the fruit of the apostolic work that his sons and daughters were carrying out there, or would carry out in the future.

Speaking of this wonderful Abruzzi region, there comes to mind the image of Don Renato Mariani. I met him in 1950 when he was still an engineering student at the University of Rome. He was one of the very first young men to decide to give his life to God in Opus Dei after meeting the Founder, who had just arrived in Italy. Renato was from Chieti and had all the qualities of the people of this land of Abruzzi. He was a hard worker, simple, generous, prudent and responsible, capable of untiring and, at the same time, calm work, without hurrying or slowing down, and never seeking any reward for himself. He was somewhat short of stature, like myself, but that is not necessarily a defect. St. Josemaría loved him very much. I recall that frequently, when looking at him, he would raise two fingers of his right hand, as though to tell us that Renato was worth two people. Because he really was an untiring worker.

After finishing his university studies with outstanding marks, he spread the spirit of Opus Dei in various cities of Italy: in Rome, Naples, Milan, Genoa, and then once again back in Rome. This was a clear contribution of the Abruzzi region to the growth of Opus Dei in Italy. Later, as a priest, he carried out a wide-ranging pastoral activity, blessed by God with abundant fruit.

I remember the pride and enthusiasm with which Renatino, as St. Josemaría called him, spoke to me about the positive aspects of Chieti that I too have learned to sincerely appreciate.

Sanctification of work and unity of life

In addition to reminding the lay faithful of their baptismal call to holiness, St. Josemaría dedicated himself to showing specific ways to attain this goal. He taught people to seek God nel bel mezzo della strada, in the midst of the busy streets, to transform into prayer and sacrifice—the gift of self to God—the apparently most insignificant actions, to see every
circumstance in one’s day as an opportunity to love God and to serve souls.

The awareness of being children of God in Christ, thanks to our incorporation into our Lord in Baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in our soul, is an essential element of our Catholic faith, very present in the soul of St. Josemaría. Divine filiation should be a fundamental source of inspiration in the spiritual life of every Christian, a constant reference point in any situation they encounter. This teaching had been deeply developed by St. Josemaría, revealing the authenticity with which he lived it in his own person, specifically in the context of ordinary life.

The holiness that a Christian strives to attain with the confidence and simplicity of one who knows himself to be a child of God, and therefore that is based not on one’s own qualities or efforts but above all on God the Father’s benevolence and mercy, is hinged on the activities that make up the fabric of our life in the world. Therefore it requires that we sanctify our work. In this regard, it seems especially appropriate to emphasize a point that St. Josemaría frequently stressed: “It’s not enough to want to do what is good; rather we have to know how to do it.” In The Forge (no. 698), a book of spiritual counsels and reflections, we read: “If we really want to sanctify our work, we have inescapably to fulfill the first condition: that of working, and working well, with human and supernatural seriousness.”

We need to work diligently and intently, with technical and professional competence, without mediocrity, fulfilling our duties down to the last detail, certain that thus we are contributing to the development of the human community. But we have to work with a Christian perspective, which leads us to see others as God’s children, to esteem them as such, and to serve them. As St. Josemaría says succinctly in one of his homilies: “the dignity of work is based on Love” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 48).

This message and spirit foster what the Founder of Opus Dei called unity of life, that is, the fusion in one’s life between action and contemplation, between work, prayer and apostolate, in the fulfillment of professional and family duties, in social relations and in civic commitments in general. Unity of life is not simply consistency, nor the result merely of mental order or organizational efficiency. A Christian is always a Christian; he is a child of God in everything he does, and prays at every
moment and in every place. Faith, hope and charity always give shape to his life. There can be no rupture between human activities and one’s relationship with God. Unity of life, therefore, is a sign by which one recognizes holiness. This is precisely the lesson that one learned from living alongside St. Josemaría, because one saw him continually turned towards God in every gesture, in every word, in all his endeavors. At his side we became aware of one of the principal consequences of the Incarnation: if God took on a created nature, then earthly, human realities, our everyday lives, in some way share in the divinity of Christ, perfect God and perfect Man.

Besides what we have already mentioned, unity of life leads to other evident consequences, all of which are very relevant today: consistency between one’s faith and actions, and full respect for the moral law, without any compromises, in all the temporal concerns that a Christian is called upon to confront. The contribution of the lay faithful to the building up of the Kingdom of God depends in large measure on the witness they give to their faith.

Responsibility of the lay faithful

In the context of unity of life, the Second Vatican Council, in the pastoral constitution Gaudium et Spes, calls upon the laity to overcome the rupture between faith and conduct, guided always by the spirit of the Gospel in the fulfillment of their earthly duties. And in recent years the magisterium of the Church has not ceased reaffirming the laity’s role in the mission of evangelization. In the apostolic letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, John Paul II set forth the challenges that await the Church in the new century in this regard. The Pope asked the laity to commit themselves with apostolic zeal, fraternal friendship, and solidarity imbued with charity to the goal of transforming their daily social relationships into an opportunity to awaken in their peers a thirst for truth, the first condition for a salvific meeting with Christ (cf. ch. III).

In addition, Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical, Deus caritas est, stressed the role of the laity in the service of charity, in accord with the immense reach that this fundamental virtue is destined to have in the society of every epoch.
The lay faithful, as members of civil society, have the right and duty to participate personally in public life. It is their task to work for a just order in society. As Christians, their mission is to configure social life in accord with the spirit of the Gospel, “respecting the nature and rightful autonomy of that order, and cooperating with other citizens according to their particular competence and responsibility” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, November 24, 2002, 1, 3). Therefore, charity should animate the lay faithful’s entire life. Let us return to the central point of our reflections: as St. Josemaría used to say, each Christian’s contribution to the bettering of society is the consequence, first of all, of the authenticity of one’s own struggle for personal sanctity.

**Primacy of the family**

In the great catechesis of Christian life carried out by St. Josemaría, particular attention was focused on the family, the basic cell of society. One will contribute to imbuing human realities with a Christian meaning only if, at the same time, one fosters the formation of truly Christian families.

Undoubtedly, in recent years the family and marriage have been the target of open and sustained attacks, to the point that in some countries the laws that once protected the family have now become inoperative, and have even been replaced by unjust laws that undermine society’s foundation and accelerate its decomposition. Pope Benedict XVI, following in the footsteps of John Paul II, who did so much to strengthen the family, insists on the importance of a deep understanding of the meaning of marriage and the family in the divine plan, in contrast to those who insist on seeing them as mere human institutions, open to arbitrary modifications with the passage of time.

As responsible citizens and consistent Christians, we have to do all we can to defend and foster the essential values in this area that hold a fundamental importance for the life of the Church and civil society. This task, one of the most urgent components of the new evangelization, falls to each one of us. St. Josemaría was greatly concerned about the good of families. When he spoke with young couples or parents, he reminded them that marriage is a specific path of Christian life, and that happiness is not
simply the consequence of attaining material goals (a comfortable life, a home, work), but of the sincere search for holiness through mutual dealings within the family. He suggested that they imitate the Holy Family of Nazareth, so as to learn from Mary, Jesus and Joseph to love, to suffer, and to give themselves for the benefit of their spouse and children, putting themselves joyfully at their service. This is the principal way of imbuing society with a Christian spirit.

At the audience granted by Pope Benedict XVI to the young people participating in the UNIV Congress (April 10, 2006)

In the audience granted by Pope Benedict XVI to the young participating in the UNIV Congress

Holy Father:

I would like to thank Your Holiness for having consented to receive the participants in the UNIV International Congress this morning—a congress which has been held in Rome each year since 1968. The aim of this meeting is to help university students to be aware of the challenges presented by today’s society and to help them to collaborate—each in his or her own place of study or work—in the task of bringing Christ to all environments. Thus so many people who are awaiting him, perhaps without knowing it, and who need him, can find him and get to know him.

Since the 1930’s, St. Josemaría Escrivá dedicated himself passionately to the university. He invited students, one by one, personally, to the task of “spreading goodness, light, enthusiasm, generosity, a spirit of sacrifice, constancy in work, deep study” (Furrow, no. 937).

To meet the Holy Father is always, for a son or daughter of the Church, a source of deep joy. It is also a call to responsibility, confirming the mission the Church has conferred upon each one: that of being “anchored firmly in the word of Christ, capable of responding to the
challenges of our times” (Message for the XXI World Youth Day). The
Roman Pontiff has set forth this goal especially for young people, who trust
sincerely in Your prayer for this intention. As Your Holiness has suggested,
we place the prayer and work of these days in the hands of Mary, in order
to be closer to Jesus on the Cross.

I now hand over the meeting to the President of UNIV 2006. Thank
you again, Holy Father.

Torna ai contenuti

Articles and Interviews

Interview with Le Figaro Magazine (April 21, 2006)

Why has the Church granted Opus Dei the status of personal prelature—the only one in existence at present? Does this enable the Church to be better informed about the evolution of secular society in general and about the Catholic community in particular?

It is true that Opus Dei is the only personal prelature in the strict sense today. But in the Church there are other circumscriptions equivalent to it on the theological and canonical plane. I am thinking of the military ordinariates or the prelature of the Mission de France, for example. These structures are not based solely on a territorial criterion for jurisdictional competence; hence the adjective “personal.”

The present, definitive status of Opus Dei corresponds exactly with its nature.[1] When one’s identity is clearly defined, everyone knows who you are and why you exist. When a suit fits you well and you are comfortable with it, it is better for everyone.

The faithful of the Prelature live in the midst of the world, wherever they happen to be: a university, an office, a vacation spot…. They try to
work well, each in his or her own profession. They are men and women who are lawyers, doctors, journalists, artists, manual workers, farmers, musicians, members of the armed forces, teachers.

Every professional environment is a place of evangelization. Every task is truly an opportunity for finding God, as St. Josemaría Escrivá taught since 1928—it’s a way of loving God and of understanding those around us better, participating in the work of creation and redemption, by means of work.

*How would you define Opus Dei’s specific contribution to the Church?*

Opus Dei—as old as the Gospel, and like the Gospel, new, as St. Josemaría said—primarily spreads a message: God calls all men and women to love him and to love their neighbor, that is, he calls them to sanctity and apostolate in everyday life. Not “despite” their work but “by means of” their work, in a world that reflects God’s goodness and that cooperates with him. It is, in a certain sense, an adventure of love.

Opus Dei provides the help needed to respond to this divine call. The Prelature offers activities of Christian formation and personal spiritual assistance that are both demanding and adapted to ordinary life.

All of this effort, both divine and human at the same time, in imitation of Jesus Christ, is based on trust in God’s loving fatherhood, faith in the risen Christ, and the action of the Holy Spirit, now present in every soul.

Opus Dei tries to fulfill this mission, in the heart of the Church, as a portion of the people of God. It is, as it were, a school of permanent formation to help people find God in their ordinary life and to share the joy of this encounter with their colleagues, friends and acquaintances.

*By investing heavily in schools, universities and centers of formation, Opus Dei has to some extent taken the place formerly held by the Jesuits in education. With one difference, that the young people educated by Opus Dei have the possibility of becoming members. How do you respond to those who might call this indoctrination?*

Within the Church the different charisms enrich one another for the good of all. All of them are useful and complementary. There is room for everyone, respecting each one’s particular concerns.
The centers of education that you mentioned spring up through the initiative and personal responsibility of specific people, who in general tend to be the parents of the students since they are the first ones interested in the education of young people. Opus Dei does not intervene in this; it respects people’s freedom in their social action.

Every person who is old enough has the possibility of belonging to Opus Dei. It is enough to feel drawn by spiritual, disinterested reasons, and to see that one fits in. Obviously a personal meeting is necessary, since this type of thing doesn’t happen by telepathy. The word “recruitment” is appropriate for the army or a commercial enterprise, but not for an ecclesial reality such as Opus Dei.

The aim of Opus Dei, like that of the Church, is not to constantly grow, but to prolong Christ’s presence in the world, and to serve souls until our Lord returns.

Naturally, this requires spreading the Christian message, in particular the call that God directs to each person in his or her ordinary life.

Opus Dei is apostolic because, being a part of the Church, it is in continuity with the first disciples of Christ who were “sent forth.” A Church that is not missionary would be a cadaver. Woe to me, said St. Paul, if I do not preach the Gospel! (cf. 1 Cor 9:16).

This is why the Second Vatican Council, and Paul VI in his exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, and finally John Paul II in Redemptio Missio, recalled the need for Christian commitment in proclaiming the Gospel. Jesus addressed a clear, unequivocal invitation to those he found on his way: “Follow me.”

At times this invitation fell on deaf ears, as in the case of the rich young man; nevertheless, Christ did not refrain from inviting him (Lk 18:22). St. Paul taught that faith comes through preaching (Rom 10:17), not just through the witness of one’s life, although that witness is a necessary prerequisite.

Opus Dei sets forth elevated ideals in a society that today is not Christian, and I hope the Prelature will always continue to do so. A
minimum of a spirit of rebellion is required, a desire for independence, but also the generosity to aspire to do something for others.

The Church therefore (and within its bosom, Opus Dei as a small portion in it), in following Christ, speaks to young people. Above all it is Christ himself who speaks to each one.

Clearly a commitment to Opus Dei requires a long path of mutual acquaintance, a lot of time, in order to carry out an initiative that is always personal and unique, as every person is in God’s eyes. Each person’s response is free, but one cannot respond if the question has not been asked. Holding up a goal in life for people, encouraging them to do something worthwhile with their life, something useful for others, is part of charity.

Why should one be surprised by this, in an era such as ours when human organizations carry out a proselytism that is all too frequently excessive and aggressive? One can recall here marketing and advertising campaigns, attempts to sensitize people to social problems, the effort to recruit people for particular jobs or to obtain a specific share of the market, or to increase the number of subscribers to a magazine, or to dissuade smokers, not to mention other areas, which at times include an harassment that is far from innocent.

Many people, perhaps because of a misunderstood humility, would never have dared to consider the possibility of finding God in their work and ordinary life, if no one had opened up for them these perspectives. Christ became man for everyone, not just for a few special people. This is a message that it’s impossible to hide!

*How can you explain Opus Dei’s being able to gather more than 300,000 faithful at the Vatican for the Founder’s canonization, when its official membership is only 85,000?*

Do the arithmetic: less than four people for each member of Opus Dei. That’s not so meritorious. Millions of people would have liked to be present at that great celebration, if they had had the time and money to go. The great majority of those who take part in Opus Dei’s formational activities don’t have any institutional tie with the Prelature. Two points need to be kept in mind. On the one hand, the Founder’s message is very attractive for anyone who has a noble love for the world and mankind—an
integral Christian commitment without doing anything extraordinary, except putting love into the smallest things. This is really possible! On the other hand, St. Josemaría’s personality was also very likable, his joy, his human warmth and simplicity. All of this has led many people to pray to him and to read his writings, even without having had any contact with Opus Dei.

Many people have commented that the appearance of The Da Vinci Code three years ago is what has led to the Work being better known, and this interview is evidence of that. Do you agree with them that the more that’s known about the Work, the better?

Yes. Ignorance is always a great evil and information is something good. Communication is not a game for amateurs. One learns over time to make oneself better known and also to understand oneself better. One needs to have patience in this field also.

Regardless of the financial autonomy of the associations run by members of Opus Dei, it must be easy in the computer era to make a list and calculate the amount of funds these have. Why don’t you do this? Is it to discredit the idea that Opus Dei is “immensely rich”? Or, on the contrary, because it is more useful to let people think this is true?

The essential thing is the free and responsible initiative arising from the base. What are the associations that are run by faithful of the Prelature? I certainly don’t know what they are, and neither do those who work alongside me. It doesn’t even pass through my head because it’s a fanciful notion. Admitting that it would be possible to do the calculations you speak of, one would end up with a heterogeneous catalog. An apple plus two chairs. How can you add violins and footballs? Which associations are directed by people who walk along streets called “Avenue of the Republic,” or by those who have green eyes or play tennis every week? What do they add up to? St. Josemaría Escrivá wanted each initiative to be financially self-supporting through the help of patrons and regular contributors. But Opus Dei does not intervene nor should it do so, also for the sake of a healthy principle of autonomy and respect for each one’s field of competence.
Born in Spain less than 80 years ago, Opus Dei is present all over the world and in practically every country. In which of them is its presence the most useful today for the evangelizing mission that has been entrusted to you? And why?

The concept of usefulness entails much more than merely technical parameters. Fruitfulness comes from God. Psalm 127 proclaims that if God does not construct the house, its builders labor in vain. The name “Opus Dei” means “work of God.” I think that Opus Dei will be useful wherever it carries out exactly its mission: there is will be well-situated, in its right place. My responsibility is precisely to see that this happens, and that’s what I am doing. I have in mind the primacy of prayer, the sanctification of work and one’s daily occupations, and therefore of one’s whole life seen as an offering made to God and a service to one’s neighbor. I see evangelization as the crowning of true friendship, person to person, heart speaking to heart, as Newman liked to say: the whole person, intellect, emotions, will. Opus Dei is useful when, as part of the Church, it helps each person to find, once more, interior peace in God’s forgiveness, in the harmonious building up of one’s personality, in the acceptance of oneself. In a word, when one is helped to realize that Jesus is still close to us, giving meaning to our lives. One can understand then why Josemaría Escrivá used to say that the happiness of heaven belongs to those who know how to be happy here on earth. Along with suffering, of course, since it is inevitable, but happy nevertheless, truly happy.

The juridical status of Opus Dei was a long-standing problem because there was no possibility in the Catholic Church for the laity to be “members in the full sense” (with the same right as the clergy) of one of its institutions. This difficulty was partially overcome after 1950 with the status of a “secular institute.” But the Founder of the Work, Josemaría Escrivá, saw this as quite unsatisfactory, perhaps because it placed Opus Dei under the authority of the bishops of the various dioceses. It was his successor as head of Opus Dei, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, who finally obtained, from Pope John Paul II, the concession of the double status of “a personal prelature” (created by Vatican II) and of “a universal diocese.” Bishop Echevarría has described this juridical status as a “suit” that fits “very comfortably.”

The official count (not including Cooperators) is 1,800 members in
Africa; 4,800 in Asia and Oceania (with a strong presence in Japan); 20,400 in North and South America; and 49,000 in Europe (of which 35,000 are in Spain, Opus Dei’s country of origin).

On the encyclical Deus caritas est, La Vanguardia, Barcelona (January 29, 2006)

*On the encyclical Deus Caritas Est,*

*published in La Vanguardia, Barcelona*

“Deus caritas est.” These words, “God is love,” from the Letter of St. John have been taken by Pope Bededict XVI as the title for his first encyclical.

God is love, one reads in almost all translations of that phrase. Are charity and love identical? In part yes and in part no. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that charity is the virtue with which we love God above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves, for love of God. Later on, it affirms that “charity ensures and purifies our human capacity to love.”

For man needs to love and be loved. A faithful and refined love is the deepest yearning of the human heart. Our entire life consists in a search for true love, a struggle to overcome the obstacles that arise, also within each of us.

Jesus Christ is the fullness of Revelation. In him we get to know God; and in him we get to know man fully, as the Second Vatican Council teaches and as Pope John Paul II frequently stressed. In Christ we discover our vocation and our greatness. And an essential part of that discovery is charity, the love that Jesus Christ ennobles and purifies. Because Christ has brought us, with his Love, *gaudium*—joy and peace.

The word “love” has undergone a type of “word inflation.” Perhaps we use it too often, at times to refer to passing feelings, or even, as the Pope points out, to expressions of selfishness.
Nevertheless, the word “charity” has perhaps undergone the opposite process, one of semantic restriction. Possibly we use it too infrequently, to refer only to specific activities, carried out for certain persons, in specific cases.

But charity is not meant to be something exceptional; rather it should form part of one’s Christian identity: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,” our Lord said. The pagans recognized Christians by this mark: “look how they love one another,” they exclaimed.

Christian love is a moral disposition that is expressed in a great variety of actions. Charity means to serve, to understand, to console, to listen, to smile, to accompany, to correct, to encourage, to ask for forgiveness and to forgive, to give and to receive.

Charity expands, as it were, in concentric circles: from one’s personal relationships to the entire society.

At the origin of the family is the spouses’ love for one another, which creates the environment where life is engendered, the home that welcomes lovingly the new being, that fosters one’s maturing as a person.

The world of work is enriched by charity. Carrying out one’s profession in accord with the Gospel precept means carrying it out with love, with the desire to serve, putting one’s heart into it, thinking about the others. Sanctifying one’s work means converting it into an expression of love for God and for all men and women, imbuing it with justice and charity.

The landscape of the Church is adorned by many light-filled sites where Christians are striving to work and serve silently out of love. One needs only to consider Africa, the continent most in need of everyone’s assistance. There the Church makes manifest its love, also “as an ecclesial act,” in the words of Benedict XVI, as an essential part of its mission. Charity spurs one to be magnanimous, to not remain indifferent when faced with the needs of others.

The Holy Father sums up the expansive process of charity: “Love is ‘divine’ because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a ‘we’ which transcends our divisions and
makes us one, until in the end God is ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28)” (no. 18). Here we can find the explanation for the perennial youthfulness of the Church.

Charity is also the key to the “new evangelization.” The mission of spreading the Gospel involves helping many people to experience Christian charity, opening their intellects to the light of faith through the language of love, the universal idiom that we all understand. For faith, as St. Paul writes, works through charity.

As St. Josemaría Escrivá said so clearly: “the principle apostolate that we Christians need to carry out in the world, the best testimony of our faith, is helping to foster within the Church an atmosphere of authentic charity.”

Christ at the Last Supper called his precept of charity “new.” “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you.” It was new then and it continues being so now, for everyone, two thousand years later. If we read and meditate on the new encyclical with the healthy curiosity of one who knows he is going to discover something new, with our intellect and heart wide open, we will discover the permanent newness of this marvelous revelation: God is love, which He longs to give to all men and women.

Thus Benedict XVI’s desire will be fulfilled: that this encyclical “may illumine and assist our Christian life.”

"The world needs a woman's gifts," article in the ABC, Madrid (March 8, 2006)

“The world needs a woman’s gifts,”

in the newspaper ABC, Madrid

International Women’s Day (March 8) points to the past, with its unfinished efforts to overcome discrimination against women, and looks to
the future, encouraging us to contemplate the benefits of having women fully integrated into every sector of society.

The first step must be to recognize the equal dignity of men and women. From the very beginning of Sacred Scripture, in the words of Genesis, we see that God created man and woman as two ways of being a person, two expressions of a shared humanity. A woman is the image of God, neither more nor less than a man, and both are called to identification with Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man.

These essential truths of our Christian faith enable us to grasp the harm that is caused by ill-treatment of any human being, whether man or woman. Mistreatment can involve violence, or other more subtle methods. Women’s bodies are brutally commercialized, presenting women as things rather than persons. They are informed, in a friendly but insidious way, that pregnancy is incompatible with continued employment. It would not be hard to find many other examples showing the need to continue opposing discrimination.

In Genesis, we also discover a second fundamental point: diversity. In the family, for example, the father and mother carry out different roles, equally necessary but not interchangeable. Their responsibility is the same, but their way of contributing differs.

We often hear that one of the family’s most acute problems today is a crisis of fatherhood. A man must neither see himself as a “second mother,” nor neglect his responsibilities at home. Rather he has to learn how to be a father. Something similar can be said about society as a whole, where each must find one’s proper place. The man has the right to develop as a man; the woman, as a woman—without ever giving rise to mimicries that produce a crisis of identity, psychological complexes and social problems of great consequence.

The principle of equality can be exaggerated and lose its equilibrium, when one confuses equality (of dignity, of rights, and of opportunity) with a dissolving of diversity. If women becomes too similar to men, or men to women, they become disoriented and forget how to relate to one another. But the difference between them can also be exaggerated—and, in fact, has
often been exaggerated—when one uses this diversity as grounds for justifying discrimination.

We can consider here the Christian virtue of charity, which Benedict XVI has chosen to place at the beginning and center of his pontificate. Charity helps to harmonize equality and diversity and invites one to a shared effort, for it orders one’s relationship with God and with other men and women. Charity in the Church fosters communion, respect, understanding, openness to diversity, mutual assistance, and service.

In the first words of Genesis we also read that God, in his goodness, entrusted the world to men and women. We have received the joint mission of caring for the world and enabling it to make progress. This challenging project helps to put the question of the relationship between the sexes in its proper place. We are not confronting a narrow and problematic scenario, but rather an open and positive one. With equal responsibility, with contributions suited to each one’s talents, we have to work together for a better society. Masculine and feminine qualities are mutually needed to carry out this joint task. For the common good—common to all, both men and women—can be achieved only through a joint effort. Thus discrimination against women is not only an offense against her person; it also harms men, and is a serious problem for the world.

A true desire to care for the world and help it progress requires abandoning any Manichean outlook and eagerness for conflict. What is needed is an attitude of dialogue, cooperation, consideration, and sensitivity. Men have to make greater demands on themselves: striving to listen, to understand, to be patient, to pay attention to persons. And women also need to strive to understand, to practice patience, to undertake constructive dialogue, and employ their rich intuition.

In his *Letter to Women*, Pope John Paul II pointed out that the contribution of women is indispensable for “the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling,” as well as for “the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity.” A woman’s gifts, with her innate aptitude for understanding and caring for others, must bear fruit in the family and in all of society.
St. Josemaría Escrivá used to say that “in God’s eyes, no occupation is in itself great or small. Everything acquires the value of the Love with which it is carried out.” When we discover that what is important is the person, discriminations of every sort will find their days numbered. Christian faith can be a true leaven for cultural change in this area if women and men of faith learn how to incarnate their faith in their daily lives.

Interview granted to IL Sole 24 Ore, Milan (May 13, 2006)

*Why is sanctifying one’s work central to Opus Dei’s message?*

Work is seen as something positive, something good. Our Founder used to say that we can recognize God’s presence not only in the world of nature, but also in the way we work, in the effort we make.

*So seeking perfection in work is characteristic of Opus Dei members?*

If work is a place where we can meet God, it has to be done as well as possible, with professional competence. But the degree of sanctity is not determined by the kind of work one does, nor by its social standing or its monetary reward.

*What about the unemployed?*

It’s important to help them, especially the young, to acquire the skills needed to render a service to society. As one example, Opus Dei operates a trade school in Rome (Centro ELIS) in a working class district where young people are trained. At this point, more than ten thousand of its graduates are employed.

*How can someone who works in finance where speculation is common find a path to sanctity?*

Sometimes we still encounter the old prejudice that such jobs are necessarily negative or dangerous for Christians. But if someone working
in finance and market transactions practices this work honestly and sees it as a service to others, it can become an occasion for giving glory to God. So yes, one can find God even on Wall Street.

*Then even financial speculation can be a path towards God?*

It mustn't involve injustice towards persons; a sound ethical context is necessary. But Jesus said that those involved in business also need to render fruit with their talents.

*Most business people never seem to think about making their “talents” bear fruit when they engage in trade....*

Sometimes acting uprightly in the world of business requires heroism. A person with an upright conscience will need to confront unjust practices that are morally unacceptable. In fact, sanctity is always heroic. We are all called to sanctity, and so everyone is capable, with God’s help, of making “heroic” decisions when circumstances require it.

*Are members of Opus Dei given some special guidance in these matters?*

They receive no guidance on how to exercise their professional work. What they do receive is Christian formation that gives them a deep moral awareness. It leads them to grow, to improve. In other words, Opus Dei helps them to grow in virtue and seek holiness, to be honest, loyal, hard working, and understanding, to learn from one’s mistakes and ask for pardon.

*Why is it often said that Opus Dei is powerful, especially in the world of finance and business?*

This got started when some people wanted to harm our apostolic work. There are some influential persons in Opus Dei, but most members are ordinary people who work in all fields. They, however, don’t make news.

*Then there are no secret agreements or business compacts in Opus Dei?*

If such things existed, the members themselves would be the first to reject them. St. Josemaria often said that he wanted to leave his spiritual children a legacy of love for freedom and good humor. I can affirm that this is so.

*In their work, then, members of Opus Dei work on their own responsibility,*
Absolutely. It often happens that persons in Opus Dei even go in opposing directions as they try to find the best way to make their profession contribute to the good of society. Each one is responsible for his or her own actions, whether they succeed or fail.

So ethics is at the heart of sanctifying one’s work?

That’s right; to consider work only from a technical point of view, to look only at its specific practical aspects would be to cheapen it. As a human action, work necessarily has an impact on each one’s personality; it makes a person better or worse because it derives its value from a higher order, an ethical dimension that goes beyond technical considerations.

Is ethics individual or corporate?

When I say that ethics makes individuals more perfect I don’t mean to imply individualism. Everyone agrees that exercising a profession at a high moral level will contribute to the common good. A person who doesn’t cheat his clients, who pays his taxes, who respects agreements, indirectly attracts people’s trust and contributes to the good functioning of society.

We have already spoken about the unemployed. But how can one sanctify one’s work in places where people are dying of hunger?

Every Christian is called upon to react, to not simply be embarrassed or scandalized in the face of extreme poverty but to take action, seeking and finding solutions to remedy it. No one can consider himself exempt from this responsibility. It is a central theme in the teaching of St. Josemaria.
Opus Dei echoes the call that Christ addressed to everyone: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). The Prelature’s mission is to spread this message and to help people put it into practice in their daily life, especially in one’s professional work. The spirituality of Opus Dei insists on the joy that can be found in the sanctification of work, in the value of little things when done for love.

*A close bond with the Pope forms part of Opus Dei’s identity. How is this relationship shown?*

As the Prelate of Opus Dei, I have actually been appointed by the Pope, and I give an account to him through the Congregation of the Bishops, with a report every five years on the state of the Prelature, similar to that given by the dioceses. Opus Dei’s mission is clearly framed by the statutes the Holy See has approved for it.

*Opus Dei is accused of being a “Church within the Church.” Its special status as a personal prelature is something unique. Why don’t you want to be under the local bishops?*

Opus Dei is not a particular Church, but it does have certain analogies with a diocese. In fact, Opus Dei is headed by a Prelate; it has its own clergy and its “cathedral” (the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace in Rome), its tribunal, etc. Within the Prelature an organic cooperation exists between laity and priests, for the good of a mission that is not limited to a specific social sector. This mission is to reconcile the world with God, in accord with St. Paul marvelous formulation. The priests incardinated in the Prelature, about 1900 in number (and on May 27th I will have the joy of ordaining another 35), are dependent on me. As far as the lay faithful are concerned, they depend on me only in what concerns their spiritual and apostolic commitments in the Prelature. The majority attend Mass in their own parish.

*Is there any danger of a conflict in authority arising with the bishops of the dioceses where members of Opus Dei live?*

No, the jurisdictions are juxtaposed, but never interfere with one another. The faithful of Opus Dei strive to respond to the orientations of the bishop of their diocese exactly as do all Catholics animated by an
authentic ecclesial concern. The Prelature can be seen as a service that the universal Church provides to the particular Churches. To put it in a few words, Opus Dei is a small portion of the Church, not a “Church within the Church.” That accusation was spread in 1981 by persons who put considerable financial resources into a lost cause, since it was a calumny.

*What does the use of the cilice and disciplines involve? Does it make sense today to seek suffering?*

Your question is something that is very marginal in regard to the reality of Opus Dei. St. Josemaría liked to say that the best penances are those that one finds in one’s own work and in daily life. For example, a smile when one is tired, finishing one’s work well, knowing how to listen to others with patience and understanding.

As far as corporal mortification is concerned, this is part of the Church’s spiritual patrimony: Thomas More, Paul VI, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Sr. Lucia of Fatima all practiced it, to cite only a few names. Even those who don’t believe in God can see some good reasons for voluntary mortification, such as solidarity with those who are suffering, controlling one’s body, the free rebellion against the tyranny of pleasure. Naturally, corporal mortification has to be practiced with common sense and moderation.

*Opus Dei is often accused of being a financial power. How is the Prelature financed and organized?*

The Prelature has practically no expenses of its own except for the maintenance of its priests. The buildings necessary for carrying out its formational activities belong to autonomous non-profit groups and entities whose names I don’t even know. Obviously Opus Dei does not operate any commercial or financial enterprises. If someone in Opus Dei runs a company, it is his own concern, not the Prelature’s, just as if he wins a tennis tournament, the acclaim is solely his. The initiatives undertaken in certain countries, for example, providing health services in the Congo, always have their own financing and keep their own balance sheets. This is not merely a façade; rather this way of acting corresponds to the professional and lay mentality of those involved. All these accusations that some persons spread, therefore, are pure fantasy.
The practice of secrecy is what seems to give the most fodder to the critics of Opus Dei. Of what use is secrecy for spreading the teachings of the Gospel?

Forgive my bluntness, but I think that claim is quite out of date. It is brought out from time to time like a tattered scarecrow, but it is hardly credible. The Prelature’s centers all over the world and its directors can be easily known by anyone who has any interest. There are diocesan directories, the web page, and the Prelature’s official bulletin, Romana. What more can we do? We aren’t going to undertake a marketing campaign as though we were selling mobile telephones. No member of the Prelature hides the fact that he or she belongs to Opus Dei. St. Josemaría used to say that he “abhorred secrecy.” On the one hand, when Opus Dei began, some found it strange that its members didn’t wear a religious habit. But that would have meant violating our own nature! On the other hand, the word “secret” is quite attractive. Christ himself said that if a person does what is true he will go into the light, so that it may be seen that his deeds are done in God (cf. Jn 3:21). But he also said that one’s left hand should not know what the right hand is doing (cf. Mt 6:3). The faithful of Opus Dei, I insist, do not hide themselves; on the contrary, they try to share their happiness with others. The same ones who accuse you of being secretive accuse you of doing apostolate. A strange contradiction. Perhaps this is a result of trying to categorize people and put them in boxes.

Isn’t there a contradiction between the public side of the Work after the canonization of its founder and the inner side, reserved to its members?

As with every human reality, one cannot be both inside and outside at the same time. Could you imagine me participating in the editorial board of La Croix? That’s not my place. In any case, Opus Dei is not closed to others. Possibly it’s one of the best known institutions in the Church today. For example, in recent years various journalists, at their own request, have shared for some time the daily life of faithful in Opus Dei, even here, in the curia of the Prelature.

The book The Da Vinci Code has been very successful. What does this fact say about our society?

It might surprise you to know that I haven’t read the book. I have a lot of commitments and don’t have extra time to waste with that kind of novel.
I think that its success is, above all, a financial success. What concerns me about the novel is not that it attacks Opus Dei, but that it attacks God and the Church. I pray every day for the author, as well as for those who have taken part in the movie, because perhaps they don't realize that they can harm people and that they are blaspheming. This phenomenon, at the same time, shows the thirst for transcendence that our society harbors. But the novel and the movie defraud these desires, and fail to meet these expectations of today's men and women. Indeed, all this shows once more the need for spiritual and religious formation. Today people are willing to listen to anyone. Loss of faith always leads to superstition.

On the anniversary of the death of John Paul II (March 25, 2006)

*On the first anniversary of the death of John Paul II*

Pope John Paul II frequently insisted that man attains his full development in giving, in giving oneself to God and to others. A year after his death, I find myself dwelling on this thought: John Paul II gave himself to God, to the Church, not only with generosity, but with real sacrifice. He sought Christ in order to love him and bring him to souls.

The difference between that Pope filled with physical strength who took the helm of the Church in 1978, and John Paul II in his final years, bent beneath the weight of fatigue and sickness, is not simply a measure of the passage of time. It also shows the totality of his self-giving. He spent all his energies in serving God and mankind.

Considering the example of a holy life invites us to ponder the fact that the Blessed Trinity has put us in this world for a purpose. We can and ought to go beyond the horizon of our own personal interests. The natural vocation of man is love, not selfishness. And for the Christian, charity has no limits; it does not discriminate, but is open to all men and women, and embraces every action in our life.

One could analyze many aspects of the extraordinary pontificate of
John Paul II and its significance for the history of the Church and the world. But today I prefer to recall this facet of his personality: his love of Jesus Christ, from which arose his capacity for sacrifice, for giving himself unreservedly to fulfilling his vocation.

On the first anniversary of the election of Benedict XVI (April 20, 2006)

One year ago, Benedict XVI was elected as the Successor of Peter, receiving the baton from John Paul II. One year is a very short span of time in the history of the Church, but sufficient for us to experience once again that in the transition from one Pope to another, over and above differences of personality, a clear continuity exists.

What underlies this continuity, above all, is the assistance the Holy Spirit offers the Church, and the prayer of the faithful for their Supreme Pastor. Unity among Catholics does not mean uniformity in things that are matters of opinion and changeable, but rather communion in the same faith, in identical hope, in fraternal charity, which, if we respond faithfully, will make us one heart and mind in Jesus Christ.

The world needs all of us in the Church to show the utmost loyalty to her mission of service, and a firm commitment in the truth. For this we now count on Pope Benedict XVI who, together with his well known human qualities, offers us in particular a firm testimony of faith in this God of ours who is Love. Our Lord wants Catholics to second the grace that moves us to adhere with our whole mind to the Magisterium of the Pope, and to pray daily, from the heart, for him and for his intentions.
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Other News

Doubleday has published a new edition of *The Way* for the United States and Canada. Several presentation ceremonies were organized for the publicity campaign. In the one in New York, among those invited to speak was Auxiliary Bishop Ignatius Catanello of Brooklyn. The new edition, entitled *The Way: the Essential Classic of Opus Dei's Founder*, includes a prologue by the Prelate of Opus Dei.

Rialp publishers has published *The Way of the Cross* in Galician, translated by Fr. Luciano Armas. The book was presented to the public in various cities of Galicia. In Santiago, together with the translator, speakers included Roman Law Professor Ángel Gomez-Iglesias and Maria Luisa Lopez, from the Rosalia de Castro Foundation. In Lugo the city’s Bishop Jose Gomez took part in the presentation. In Orense the presentation took place on a local television program that was rebroadcast at various times throughout the week. Newspapers also reported on the event in a number of Galician cities.

On January 14 *Kristu Pātha* was published, the Malayalam translation of *The Way of the Cross* by St. Josemaría. This language is spoken by more than 30 million people in the state of Kerala in southern India. The translation was carried out under the encouragement of Archbishop Emeritus of Kottayam, Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry. “My interest in Opus Dei led me to read all the published works of St. Josemaría Escrivá. During Lent I used *The Way of the Cross* for my personal devotion. And for the good of the people who speak Malayalam, I arranged to have the book translated,” said the Archbishop.

On June 24, in Brazil, a street in Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, was dedicated in honor of St. Josemaría. The street is located in the eastern section of the city, close to the Botanical Garden and the Catholic University. The initiative was due to the efforts of João Carlos Nedel, city councillor. The Porto Alegre municipal council approved it
unanimously. The plaque with the name of the street—*São Josemaría Escrivá-Fundador do Opus Dei*—was unveiled in the presence of about a hundred people, among whom were civil and church authorities and district representatives.

On June 25 a relic of St. Josemaría was placed in the parish of Santo Antônio do Limão in São Paulo. The relic has been installed next to a painting of the saint that has been venerated in that church for some time. In connection with the event, Holy Mass was concelebrated by the Regional Vicar of the Prelature and the pastor. A large number of faithful took part in the ceremony.

The Information Office of Opus Dei in Paris published a booklet in June entitled *Visages de l’Opus Dei*, which includes testimonies of faithful and Cooperators of the Prelature about how their daily life is influenced by the spirit that St. Josemaría received and taught people to live.

In January, White Wave Publications, in Seoul, published three thousand copies of a new translation of *The Way* in Korean (*Guil*). Many readers have been getting access to the book via the internet. *Guil* has also been widely spread through *Catholic Digest Korea*, a magazine with a large circulation in the country.

The first edition of *The Way* in simplified Chinese ideograms was published by Spring Publications of Hong Kong in April 2006. Two thousand copies of the book, entitled *Dou Lou*, were printed in the first run.

In the city of Rosario, Argentina, a projection of *A Love for Freedom* was organized. This documentary illustrates some of St. Josemaría Escrivá’s teachings on freedom, with the testimony of various faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei. Some 300 people took part in the projection of the
video in a meeting hall located on the banks of the Paraná River. Many of those invited were journalists from local papers.

The city of Mar del Plata (Argentina) has a new statue of St. Josemaría. The official inauguration included a presentation by Fr. Patricio Olmos, Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Argentina. He spoke on freedom in the message of St. Josemaría. Following his presentation, a projection of the documentary *A Love for Freedom* was held. The ceremony concluded with the blessing of the statue.

The first Estonian edition of *Holy Rosary* was published in December 2005, and a large number of copies were distributed during the winter and spring of 2006.

Three DVD’s containing highlights of get-togethers with St. Josemaría in Spain and Latin America and the documentary *A Gift of God* have been made available in Lithuanian.

The publishing companies *M* of Krakow and *Ks. Sw. Jacka* of Katowice have published the Polish version of the third and last volume of the biography of St. Josemaría by Andres Vázquez de Prada. *M* publishing company has also republished *A Retreat with St. Josemaría Escrivá* (*Rekolekcje ze sw. Josemaría Escrivá*). This is a collection of the Founder of Opus Dei’s writings, grouped around the classic themes of a retreat. Each theme has a brief introduction by the editor, Juan Luis O’Dogherty. Meanwhile the Warsaw company *Apostolicum* and *Ks. Sw. Jacka* have jointly brought out the seventh reprint of *Bruzda* (*Furrow*) in an easy-to-handle small edition. The same publishing companies have also jointly published *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá* (*Rozmowy z pralatem Escrivá*) and *In Love with the Church* (*Kochac Kościol*). The second Polish printings of both books, they complete a collection of the works of the Founder of Opus Dei in an especially attractive format. The series was begun in connection with the centennial of his birth.
Liturgical Feast of St. Josemaria

The large number of people taking part in the Eucharistic ceremonies in honor of St. Josemaría on June 26, his liturgical feast, reflected the widespread and deep devotion to the Founder of Opus Dei throughout the world. These ranged from Hamburg in Germany to Santa Marta in Colombia; from Wellington, New Zealand, to Riga, Latvia; from Almaty, Kazakhstan, to Luanda in Angola, where the Mass of St. Josemaría was celebrated in the Cathedral for the first time. In many cases the celebration was presided over by the local bishop, the apostolic nuncio, or another ecclesiastical authority. Naturally in many churches the Mass of St. Josemaría was celebrated without special solemnity, simply through the devotion of the pastors or faithful.

Here we have gathered only a few examples. In the Archdiocese of Palo, on the island of Leyte, the Philippines, there is a mission dedicated to St. Josemaría, which may soon become a parish. This year the Mass in honor of its patron, on June 26, was attended by about a thousand people.

On the evening of June 26, the Prelate of Opus Dei celebrated the Mass of St. Josemaría in the basilica of St. Eugene in Rome. In the cathedral of Florence, at about the same time, six hundred people gathered to participate in the Eucharistic celebration presided by Cardinal Julian Herranz. In his homily, Cardinal Herranz, president of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, spoke about the day of St. Josemaría’s death, June 26, 1975. In the pockets of his cassock that day they found two significant items: a notebook with some thoughts and aspirations written down that bore witness to his burning love for Jesus, and a small whistle, a reminder of the need to awaken people’s consciences. Starting with these recollections, the Cardinal went on to develop some reflections on a life lived in union with Christ and on the apostolic mission of Christians.

In Tallinn, capital of Estonia, the principal celebrant of the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría was Bishop Philippe Jourdan, apostolic administrator of the diocese. His homily was preached both in Estonian
and in Russian. Basing himself on St. Josemaría’s teachings, he encouraged those present to follow closely in Christ’s footsteps in their daily duties, whether the harvesting of potatoes or internet communication, two equally common activities in Estonia.

The archbishop of Yaoundé and president of the Cameroon Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop Victor Tonyé Bakot, celebrated the Mass of St. Josemaría in the Cathedral of Yaoundé for over 1200 people. In his homily he praised the life of the Founder of Opus Dei, who, he said, “appeared as a star in the dark skies of a humanity that is ever less concerned with salvation in Jesus Christ.” He cited various interventions of John Paul II in connection with St. Josemaría, and at one point declared: “I think both of them were united in their concern to make our Church a Church of saints, since all the effort that the Founder of Opus Dei put into inviting men and women to holiness, John Paul II put into beatifying and canonizing people.” He concluded with these words: “Echoing Pope John Paul II, of venerable memory, who beatified and canonized St. Josemaría, we want to say in this cathedral and in this Mass: don’t be afraid of being saints for the third millennium.”

About three thousand faithful attended the Mass in the Cathedral of São Paulo, a solemn concelebration in honor of St. Josemaría presided over by Archbishop Raymond Damasceno Assis of Aparecida. In his homily the Archbishop recalled St. Josemaría’s pilgrimage to the Shrine of Aparecida in May 1974. Archbishop Assis announced that in a side chapel of the shrine, close to where St. Josemaría knelt to pray the Rosary, his image would be placed for the veneration of the Brazilians who come to Aparecida in huge numbers (a hundred thousand pilgrims visit the shrine every weekend). At the beginning of the Mass a message was read from the cardinal of São Paulo, who was unable to preside at the ceremony because he was out of the city, but who wanted to unite himself to the celebration and who prayed for abundant apostolic fruit from the work of Opus Dei.
Dedications of streets and plazas in Italy to St. Josemaria

In Fauglia, a small industrial town in the province of Pisa, a school was dedicated to Pope John Paul II and a square to St. Josemaría Escrivá. The Scuola Giovanni Paolo II is located on the new Piazza San Josemaría Escrivá. On the evening of January 27 a public ceremony was held in Fauglia entitled Giovanni Paolo II e San Josemaría Escrivá, messaggeri del III millennio. Among the speakers were Tommaso Strambi, a journalist for the La Nazione newspaper in Florence, Cesare Stefanini, a robotics researcher at the Istituto Sant’Anna in Pisa, and Fr. Robin Weatherill, a priest of Opus Dei. On the following day, Saturday, the inauguration of the school and square took place. The mayor of Fauglia, Riccardo Froli, took part in the ceremony, as did Bishop Fausto Tardelli of San Miniato. The latter spoke about the relationship between the teachings of St. Josemaría and those of John Paul II. Before his remarks, a message from Pope Benedict XVI was read.

On January 28, the city of Rapallo, near Genoa, also dedicated a plaza to St. Josemaría. Present at the ceremony were the mayor, Armando Ezio Capurro, and Bishop Alberto Tanasini of Chiavari, among other civil and religious authorities, together with a large number of the public. The inauguration of the plaza was preceded by a simple ceremony in which, in addition to the mayor and the bishop, addresses were given by the rector of the Campus Biomedico University in Rome, Vincenzo Lorenzelli, and Fr. Gérard Thieux, chaplain of the Peschiera University Residence in Genoa. The Piazza San Josemaría Escrivá overlooks the sea. From it one can also see the old Genoa highway that St. Josemaría undoubtedly traveled on June 23, 1946, on his first trip to Rome.

On March 26, in Naples, an image of St. Josemaría was installed in the parish church of Our Lady of Victory. The blessing took place during Sunday Mass. The pastor, Fr. Enzo Loiodice, held up the life of St. Josemaría as an example for his faithful and, with Easter fast approaching, invited them to prepare themselves with a personal conversion shown in specific acts of charity. To that end, the collection at Mass was earmarked for the construction of wells for drinking water in a rural area of India.
Inauguration of the Josemaría Escriva de Balaguer Library

People from the area around the University of La Sabana know St. Josemaría Escrivá as “the saint of ordinary life.” Their affection for the Founder of Opus Dei has been shown in many different ways. A recent example is the city of Zipaquirá, which inaugurated the St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer public library.

The rector of the university, Obdulio Velasquez Posada, the secretary and vice-rector, Rafael Stand Niño, and the director of communications, Luis Obregon Rendon, accompanied the city authorities during the ceremony. The initiative was made possible thanks to a donation obtained through the university.

During the ceremony, the municipal representatives emphasized the importance of the University of La Sabana in the region and the need for new cooperative efforts to further the education of young people in Zipaquirá.

Many of the people from the town were present and showed their appreciation for this new cultural institution.
News
Pontifical Appointment

On May 25, 2006 the Holy Father Benedict XVI appointed Bishop Francisco Polti as Bishop of Santiago del Estero (Argentina).

New Centers of the Prelature

The Regional Vicars have established new Centers of the Prelature in the following cities:

Milan, Italy; Muntinlupa City, The Philippines; Quezon City, The Philippines; Puerto de Santa Maria, Spain; Temuco, Chile; Trujillo (2 centers), Peru; and Valencia, Spain.

Don Álvaro

The Prelate of Opus Dei presided at a Eucharistic concelebration in suffrage for the Servant of God Bishop Álvaro del Portillo in the Church of St. Josemaría in Rome on the evening of March 23, the twelfth anniversary of his death. The Church was filled with numerous families from the neighborhood and also many people from throughout Rome who participate in the Prelature’s pastoral work. All preserve a vivid memory of Don Álvaro, who took an active role in spurring on the construction of the parish church.

Prayers and Masses in suffrage for the soul of Don Álvaro were also offered in many other cities throughout the world on the anniversary of his death. In Kinshasa, a Mass was held in the Cathedral of Notre Dame du Congo on March 22. It was presided over by Msgr. Xavier Hervás, Regional Vicar of the Prelature, with priests from various dioceses of the Congo concelebrating, including Lisala, Kolwezi, Molegbe, and Kinshasa. Many families were present, in expression of their gratitude to the person
who set in motion the stable apostolic work of the Prelature in that country. In his homily, Msgr. Hervás, referring to the message of Benedict XVI for Lent, invited those present to live that time of grace and conversion with a sense of responsibility, being a leaven of holiness in their own surroundings and especially for their families, as Don Álvaro so often urged. He also encouraged those present to have recourse to the fount of divine mercy, that is to say, the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confession. In fact, many people received the sacrament of reconciliation that evening. The prayer of the faithful included petitions for the Pope and for peace in the Congo and the whole world.

As has become traditional each year, the CITE Technical Institute organized a Mass for Don Alvaro on March 23 in the city of Cebú in the Philippines. The Mass was held in the cathedral. Concelebrating were the Bishop, Julito Cortes, and two other priests. Over one thousand people attended, including many students of the CITE with their families and friends.
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
Conference at the School of Institutional Communication

Some 300 communications professionals from 52 countries gathered in Rome from April 27 to 29 for the Fifth International Seminar on Church Communications. The meeting, organized by the School of Institutional Communications at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, was entitled “Strategic Management of Church Communications: New Challenges, New Directions.”

The conference explored ways to communicate the Church’s message in a clear and positive manner.

The first day, April 27, dealt with the organization and direction of a communications department. The first address, by Juan Manuel Mora, instructor of institutional communications at the Pontifical University, was entitled: “Key Principles for Managing Church Communications Offices.” For a Church institution, Mora stressed, “to be clear does not mean renouncing mystery, negating transcendence, or trivializing one’s message, which would amount to forgetting one’s own identity.”

The second conference dealt with the need to be enterprising and creative. The new communications environment demands that a communications office be a source of abundant ideas and contacts. Professor Julia Prats, from the IESE Business School, described some of the characteristics of an enterprising person: “the ability to identify opportunities, skill in evaluating their feasibility, and the capacity to transform them into tangible realities.”

In the next part of the conference, dedicated to the evaluation of different communications programs, the focus was on the specific experience of the Church in Italy and in the United States.

Msgr. Claudio Giuliodori, director of the Office of Social Communications for the Italian Bishops’ Conference, described the communications strategy adopted for the 2005 Italian referendum on in-vitro fertilization. After noting some of its positive consequences, Msgr. Giuliodori said that “the referendum also served to redefine the role of
Catholics in the country. Catholics showed themselves to be conscientious defenders and promoters of the fundamental and irrevocable values of social life: the value of life, the centrality of the family, science, culture, solidarity and subsidiarity. One interesting point worth noting is the important convergence with many non-Catholics in what relates to the value of life.”

On his part, the Director of Communications for the United States Bishops’ Conference, Msgr. Francis J. Maniscalco, offered a picture of “The Church in the United States after the Crisis.” A lively discussion followed these two presentations moderated by Dr. Leticia Soberón from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

The evening session was a round table discussion on the topic: “Taking the initiative: experiences of diocesan and bishops’ conference offices of communications.” The session was moderated by Jesús Colina, director of the Zenit news agency. Participants included Maria Hasselgren, director of the press office for the Diocese of Stockholm, Victor Khroul, director of the press office for the Russian Bishops’ Conference, and Jan-Wilem Wits, spokesman for the Netherlands Bishops’ Conference.

The session on Friday, April 28, opened with the address of Archbishop Angelo Amato, secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who spoke on “Presenting the magisterium in a mass-media world.” Afterwards, Diego Contreras, professor of Information Analysis at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, spoke on “Framing and news values in providing information on the Catholic Church.”

“The magisterium and communications are closely related, given that it is the magisterium’s task to faithfully interpret and authoritatively communicate the Word of God to the faithful,” began Archbishop Amato. Confronted with conditions that can hinder this from being carried out effectively, the challenge lies “in formation, which implies creative planning of a high cultural quality and, above all, a solid education in the faith.”

Professor Contreras pointed out that “a certain level of reciprocal mistrust between journalists and Church communicators is perhaps inevitable.” “But it is absurd,” he continued, “to think that there can only be authentic journalism when one attacks the Church. Or (on the part of a
communications office) to think that every criticism is, by definition, an attack. Rather, one needs to emphasize that which unites both parties. For example, both share a common enemy: the public’s ignorance.”

The second case study session featured Austen Ivereigh, director of public affairs for the Archdiocese of Westminster (London). His address was entitled “To speak or to remain silent? Responding to news in a post-Christian environment.” Following him, Marco Tosatti, Vatican correspondent for La Stampa, spoke on “The media’s agenda vs. the Church’s agenda: a journalist’s perspective.” “What journalists hope to find in a Church communications office,” said Tosatti, “is credibility, sincerity and availability.” The moderator was Cindy Wooden from the Catholic News Service.

The second round table, coordinated by the dean of the organizing school, Norberto Gonzalez Gaitano, was entitled: “Is it possible to communicate the essential? The difficult passage from ‘ecclesiastical’ information to ‘religious’ information.” Taking part were Maria Grazia Murru and Patricia Thomas, Vatican correspondents for Associated Press Television News, who spoke on the topic of “Religion in the secular media,” and Gennaro Ferrara, from Sat2000, who read an address by the director of Avvenire, Dino Boffo, on “Religion in the Catholic media.”

In his address Boffo insisted that, in the Catholic media, “we must speak about everything, without letting ourselves be infected by the widespread view that religion is outmoded. We also have to communicate unpleasant news, referring to it with prudence, but without reticence or fear, because God is greater than our sins.”

The final day began with a Mass in honor of St. Catherine of Siena, patroness of the School of Institutional Communications, on the School’s tenth anniversary. Officiating at the celebration was Archbishop John Foley, President of the Pontifical Council of Social Communications. The Mass was held in the Basilica of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, where the remains of the saint are interred.

This was followed by a practical session with Barry McLoughlin and Laura Peck, from Canada’s McLoughlin Media, entitled “Navigation Code for Spokespersons in the Church.”
The seminar concluded with an address by the director of the Vatican Press Office, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, who spoke about the transition period between the pontificate of John Paul II and that of Benedict XVI. “I would like to stress something that is absolutely essential for a Church communicator,” said Dr. Navarro-Valls: “access to the facts and to persons. If the communicator himself is unsure of what he is going to communicate, he will never transmit certainty to the one listening to him.”

Through more than 30 communications, teachers and media professionals offered different perspectives on the work of the Church’s communications offices. For example, Miriam Diez Bosch spoke on “Communications and the media in the Spanish Bishops’ Conference”; Klaus Klein-Schmeink offered reflections on “World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne in the German press”; and Andreu Rocha Scarpetta addressed the question of “The responsibility of the Church’s communications offices in an ecumenical and inter-religious context.”

In Brief

Cologne (Germany) -- "After Work" Mass

Cologne, Germany

“After Work” Mass

At St. Pantaleon, a parish in downtown Cologne entrusted to priests of the Opus Dei Prelature, a Mass intended especially for young couples is celebrated on the first Monday of each month at eight in the evening. The time for Mass is unusual in Germany, but it provides many couples with the possibility of attending Mass together, something not easy on a week day. This is often not possible in the morning or afternoon, not only
because of work but also because in Germany people usually have their evening meal quite early.

This initiative is in part a response to Pope Benedict XVI's desire to make the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* better known. The topics of the successive chapters in the *Compendium* provide the material for the homilies at Mass. Thus those attending are encouraged to begin reading it on their own and to go more deeply into the Church's teachings.

The present Pope, as did John Paul II, has also sought to encourage the custom of Eucharistic adoration. Before Mass, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is held, with an opportunity to receive the sacrament of Penance.

The “After Work” Mass has been very well received, and the Church is filled on each first Monday of the month.

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**Santiago (Chile) -- The historical figure of Jesus Christ**

In May, more than three hundred people attended a seminar entitled “True God and True Man,” held in the auditorium of the library of the University of the Andes. The speakers were the Vice-Chancellor and the Dean of the School of Theology from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.

The Vice-Chancellor, Bishop Andres Arteaga, made reference to certain publicity campaigns centered on erroneous views of Christ. He said that these provided “an opportunity to speak well and in an attractive way about Jesus Christ and the Church.” He cited documents of the Second Vatican Council and words of John Paul II that invite the faithful to contemplate the face of Christ and to try to reflect it. He spoke of the need to “walk more quickly, in a more generous and effective way” on the path to knowing Jesus, the Gospels and the supernatural nature of the Church.
For his part, the Dean of the School Theology at the Catholic University of Chile, Samuel Fernandez, noted that “the solid and serious historical studies that show us the faith as a reasonable option contrast with the lack of seriousness and the fragile arguments of those who, in recent times, are trying to deform Christ’s face.” He called attention to the lack of seriousness with which certain writers, with purely commercial ends, interpret the apocryphal gospels. He ended his intervention by encouraging those present to maintain a living and personal relationship with God through reading the Gospels, participation in the Eucharist, and meditation on and study of the mysteries of Christ’s life.

Kenya has more than eight million school-age children. For the 250,000 teachers registered in the Teachers Service Commission, the task confronting them is not an easy one.

Since 2002, Strathmore University, through its Humanities Institute, has been offering three-day courses for teachers. The goal is to improve the self-esteem of teaching professionals and help foster a high human and moral level in the schools. The courses include sessions on specific virtues and on the need for parents to take an active role in the education of their children, as well as joint discussions aimed at drawing up a future code of ethics for teachers.

These courses, organized in April and August during school vacations, are held both in Strathmore and in the schools. Upon returning to their schools, many teachers have taken the initiative to get their classrooms painted or recreation areas cleaned up. Many of them also try to meet with the children’s parents and explain the importance of assisting the school's efforts.

From March 7 to 9, at the request of the Bishops’ Conference of Kenya, Strathmore University organized a seminar for diocesan secretaries
of education. Twenty-three attended, of whom 14 were priests. The seminar took place at the Savelberg Retreat Centre. David Siele, Director of Higher Education for the Ministry of Education, gave the inaugural address. Archbishop John Njue, president of the educational commission for the Bishops’ Conference, celebrated Mass for those attending. In his homily he emphasized the importance of ensuring that the schools run by the Church provide a rigorous and complete education. The Catholic Church runs or sponsors more than half the high schools in Kenya, and the diocesan secretaries of education coordinate the work of these schools, of whose governing boards they form part.

Professor John Odhiambo, Vice-Chancellor of Strathmore University, spoke about the importance of fostering virtues in the family and in the school. “Parents should give their children suitable teaching from an early age,” he said. “Teaching chastity as a subject and not a virtue can deform children. Fostering a culture of immediate pleasure does not lead to happiness. We have to guard against that falsehood.”

Participants published a document with 35 resolutions, including such recommendations as facilitating the reception of the sacraments in the school, reintroducing traditional prayers, and assisting the formation of Catholic teachers so that children in turn receive solid doctrine.

At the end of the seminar the group visited Strathmore University and the priests concelebrated Holy Mass with the University chaplains.

Rosario (Argentina) -- Solidarity trips to Suripujio with students from Austral University

For the past year, volunteers from the DAS (the Solidarity Assistance Department of Austral University in the city of Rosario) have been traveling to the village of Suripujio. The activity is organized in coordination with the principal of the Exodo Jujeño School there. Pupils at the school, which had already been receiving financial assistance from the
Department, frequently sent letters expressing their thanks and inviting the university students to come and visit. Finally the university arranged a first trip for students who wanted to provide help to that remote community (Suripujio is more than 1,000 miles from Rosario). Contributions were collected and plans made to carry out projects to help the people in the area improve their living conditions and opportunities for employment.

Suripujio is located in Jujuy province at an altitude of 12,600 feet above sea level. Some 8 miles away is Yavi, an ancient village that was the site of an important native settlement under Spanish rule. In Quechua, the suri is a bird typical of the area, similar to a small ostrich, and pujio means “watershed.” So “suri-pujio” means “the place where the suris drink,” or “suri watering place.”

Suripjio has no electricity or gas. Some sixty families live in the village, with a total population of about 160. The villagers have around 500 sheep, llamas and “vicuñas” (an alpaca-like animal), from which they obtain meat and hides, and wool that they weave on primitive looms. They also raise vegetables for food, living in a subsistence economy. In the morning they lead their flocks to pasture, and when the sun sets they enclose them in stone corrals called pircas to protect them from foxes, mountain lions and other predators. Overseeing the village is a chief whose decisions are accepted by common agreement. Profoundly religious, inheritors of the Spanish evangelization, they impart catechesis among themselves through oral transmission. During Lent they gather at night to take part in “la doctrina,” a special meeting when the older people instruct the younger ones by means of songs, prayers and psalms.

On the first trip students helped villagers to complete construction of a chapel. It is in colonial style and has two bell towers, a single nave, five glazed windows and a stone altar. This year students painted the outside of the chapel and installed some windmills.

The villagers hope that the windmills will improve their future. They can now fill drinking troughs with water and won’t have to spend hours walking with their flocks to watering holes as they did in the past. The water pumped by the mills will also enable them to irrigate the fields and improve their crops (potatoes, beans, and alfalfa).
Pembroke (Massachussets) -- "The Art of Living": dexterity in managing a home

In January 2006, the fourth session of the annual seminar “The Art of Living” was held at Arnold Hall. The seminar is intended for high school students interested in subjects connected with the home. Forty girls from the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico took part.

Two popular activities in the seminar are the “mystery basket” and the “project gallery.” The “mystery basket” is a culinary competition in which each team receives a basket of unknown ingredients. The team has two hours to prepare a meal for four people presented in an attractive way. A panel of culinary art experts examines the menu chosen, as well as the preparation techniques and the attractiveness of the final presentation. First prize went to the team from Shellbourne Conference Center in Valparaiso, Indiana. The Lyncroft team from Toronto, Canada took second place.

In the “project gallery,” the most highly praised presentation was that of girls from Washington D.C. on the healthy effects of chocolate. Other projects included flower table arrangements, family photographs, afternoon tea, the history of gingerbread, and the production of costume jewelry from natural elements.

In addition to the competitions, conferences were offered on such topics as organizing large parties, Italian cuisine and fashion.

Sydney (Australia) -- Inauguration of Nairana Study Centre

The new seat of Nairana Study Centre was officially inaugurated on April 29 in Pennant Hills, in Sydney’s northwest suburbs.
On the previous day Bishop David Walker of Broken Bay, the diocese in which Nairana is located, celebrated Mass in the center’s oratory.

The event attracted a large number of parents of boys who take part in its activities and other friends, as well as some well-known public figures. Among them were Philip Ruddock, federal Minister of Justice; Nick Berman, the Mayor of Hornsby Shire; Bishop Issam J. Darwish, the Melkite Eparch of Australia and New Zealand; and several members of the parliament of New South Wales.

Journalist Mike Willesee gave an address in which he spoke about his return to the Catholic faith and encouraged the high school boys who attend the center to grow in their faith. “One piece of advice I want to give you,” he said, “is that when you have any doubt, ask yourself: What would Jesus do? Because you know that he is always with you, and he is the best friend you can have.” Willesee also expressed his hope that “through centers like this many people may get to know our Lord better.”

On his part, the director of Nairana, John-Paul Hinojosa, said: “From the first moment of the Nairana project, the parents have realized that the formation of young people doesn’t end at home. The parents who are founders of this project were aware that their children needed a personalized guide to channel their energies and develop their talents. Now more than ever, there is a great need for places where young people feel challenged to give the best of themselves—a place that enriches their moral and spiritual lives in a healthy and positive environment. That is precisely what Nairana tries to offer and in fact has offered for many years, since it first opened.”

In addition to human and Christian formation, Nairana also offers academic and sports programs. It also fosters the boys’ sense of social responsibility and their eagerness to serve their community. The boys who frequent the center regularly visit the aged and sick in the area. Nairana also organizes work camps in developing countries such as Sri Lanka, Fiji and The Philippines.
Nitroí (Brazil) -- A positive anthropological model

Niterói is the site of Lumiar Club for school-age girls. Besides the regular activities of cultural, spiritual and doctrinal formation, its programs include, since 2005, a class on the very timely topic of the human and Christian dignity of women. This class focuses particularly on fashion, which today is subject to grave moral deviations. Its aim is to strive to ensure that the girls acquire, from an early age, a Christian ideal of beauty and elegance, so that instead of allowing themselves to be led, they see the need to bear a positive influence on the environment around them.

In addition, a group of university and professional women gather each week in the Enseada Cultural Center to study, with a Christian focus, various aspects of anthropology, especially those related to human emotions. Their objective is to develop a training program for the guidance of one’s feelings or “affectivity” that parents and educators can make use of.

Recently, after six months of work and study, Emilia Fidalgo Alves, a psychologist, and Ana Cecília de Campos Sampaio, an economist, have begun to apply their findings in schools in Rio de Janeiro and Niterói. They have tackled with Christian criteria and morally responsible arguments such concerns as abortion, the prevention of AIDS, sexual relations outside marriage, etc. At the end of the sessions, time is set aside for questions and specific cases. The results have been quite positive, and the recommendation of teachers who have taken part in the program have led to new schools requesting the training course.

Moergestel (Netherlands) -- Educating in the faith: where to begin?

A Family Day, organized by the SOKA foundation, was held in the Zonnewende Conference Center on May 7, with about 200 people taking part. The conference had as its focus “Educating in the faith: where to
begin?” Babi Rieu and Bert Buirma, the parents of five children between the ages of ten and sixteen, offered their experiences on the religious formation of their children in school and in the family. They emphasized three basic ideas: living the faith in a natural way; personal prayer in the family and by the family; and finally, for the parents as well as their children, the realization that personal formation is never finished. They also spoke about the role of the sacraments (the Eucharist, Penance and Confirmation) in their children’s life, stressing the need to explain them in a practical way and to focus on the central concerns for each stage in their children’s development.

During the conference, those taking part had the opportunity to browse through recent catechetical material.

The Family Day also included a parallel program for children with quite a different theme: “Discovering nature.” It included games and walks in the surrounding area.

Paris (France) -- Soiree Harambee

On Wednesday May 10, in the Espace du Centenaire Hall in Paris, the first Soirée Harambee was held. Organized by the association Les amis de Josemaría Escrivá, it had as its purpose the collecting of funds to benefit educational and humanitarian projects in Africa. The event, with some 250 people in attendance, was enhanced by an African choral group.

Professor Léon Tshilolo, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of the founders of Harambee, presented four of the projects that the African assistance foundation, born on the occasion of the canonization of St. Josemaría, hopes to finance in 2006. These include a professional training center for women refugees from southern Sudan; a formation program for primary school teachers in Kenya; another program in Madagascar, to assist heads of families who want to start their own handicraft enterprises; and, in Dr. Tshilolo’s own country, the construction
of three new rural clinics in the area around Monkole hospital, near Kinshasa.

The presentation of the programs was followed by the projection of a video. The organizers hoped to obtain between fifty and a hundred thousand Euros in donations. This may be only a “drop in the bucket,” but as the secretary of the Association pointed out, one must never forget that the great African rivers are made up of many small streams.

Sao Paulo (Brazil) -- "Life is Metaphysics"

The Sumaré Center for University Studies in São Paulo opened the academic year on March 15 with a lecture by the well-known Brazilian poet Bruno Tolentino. The topic selected in agreement with the speaker was “Life is Metaphysics.”

Tolentino has published a large body of work in Portuguese, English, French, and Italian. After some years spent teaching at Oxford, he returned to Brazil ten years ago. He has published five books and has been awarded three Jabuti prizes, the country’s most prestigious literary award, in addition to receiving other distinctions.

In his talk he developed the idea that human life, even in its simplest and most ordinary manifestations, cannot be explained if one does not take into account its transcendent dimension, although so many people ignore it. Using verses from the Brazilian poet Cecilia Meireles, Tolentino emphasized the role that memory has in the perception of transcendence, especially in the definitive reality of death.

The conference was attended by university students and young professionals. Some of them take part in the means of formation offered by Opus Dei, and a number are part of a philosophy study group that meets weekly at the center.
Valencia (Spain) -- The Family, the School, and the Media

The Foundation for the Development of Social Communication (COSO) was created by a group of Valencian journalists nine years ago as a result of previous experience as an informal working group. Their purpose is to assist the formation of journalists and communicators and to foster topics in public debate related to human values.

On February 25, in its fourteenth working session, the COSO Foundation brought together two specialists to speak on “The family and youth in television fiction.” The meeting took place in Valencia’s Instituto Francés. Before an audience of some fifty journalists, TV producers, teachers and leaders of family organizations, the image of the family and of youth presented on television was analyzed. The conference sought to explore the impact of television on society, particularly in the year of the World Congress of Families.

By way of introduction, Ximo Perez, president of Empresas Audiovisuales Valencianas Federadas, gave a description of the national production of television fiction since television arrived in Spain some fifty years ago.

The address by Ruth Gutierrez, professor in the School of Communications at the University of Navarra and an expert on movie and television script writing, was entitled “The new heroes of the televised mirror.” She provided elements for an analysis based on the narrative structure of television programs.

The second talk was by Petra María Pérez, professor of Educational Anthropology at the University of Valencia and head of the Institute for Educational Creativity and Innovation. In 2003 she published a study entitled “The socializing impact of TV on children and adolescents in the Valencian community.” In her talk she stressed the effect television content can have on young children.

The working session ended with a round table moderated by Jose Ramon Navarro, editor of the newspaper La Razón.
Several weeks later, in collaboration with *Magisterio*, a periodical specializing in education, COSO brought together in Valencia a dozen experts for a professional seminar. They spoke to the principals of more than a hundred schools—public, cooperative and private—on the need for a plan of communications in schools, especially when problems with public repercussions arise, as in the case of school violence. The study conference was closed by Carlos Precioso, Undersecretary of the Council for Culture, Education and Sport in the Autonomous Community of Valencia.

**Stockholm (Sweden) -- Is ethics possible in journalism?**

On April 6 in the Atheneum University Residence in Stockholm a round table was held with various journalists from the national press and television, a professor from the school of journalism and the ombudsman or defender of the public against the press. The topic of the debate was: “Is ethics possible in journalism?”

The focus was on difficult situations that called for a choice between following the dictates of one’s conscience and professional “success.”

The need to place truthfulness and objectivity above providing of interesting and entertaining news was also stressed. At times the need to comment rapidly on unexpected news leads to a lack of care in checking one’s facts and to compromising the truth.

The intervention of the *ombudsman* stressed the need to respect people’s privacy and personal integrity. A good journalist, he said, has to respect the truth, exercise justice and show empathy.

The conclusion reached was that ethics is possible in journalism, although unfortunately transgressions are quite frequent. Another important point made was that in contemporary society the private sphere is steadily diminishing while the public sphere is expanding.
Following the debate, the public had an opportunity to ask questions. Afterwards refreshments were provided, allowing everyone to exchange impressions with the speakers in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Many of the participants drew the conclusion that, in the end, the public is responsible for what appears in the press. If people refuse to read a newspaper or watch a television program, they will soon disappear.

Manila (Philippines) -- Work camps in Poctoy and Bais City

Fourteen students from Southridge School spent April 9 to the 15 on the island of Marinduque. They painted the roof and fence and the ceilings of the classrooms at the Poctoy school. The project was carried out thanks to the collaboration between Molave Study Center, the Southridge Association of Parents and Teachers, local authorities from the Ministry of Education, and many private benefactors.

Another 29 students from Southridge traveled to Bais City in the province of East Negros, where they did masonry work at the Bais Family Farm School. They also spent a day with the Aetas tribal community. They learned about their customs and way of life and gave them packages of food, milk, soap, shampoos and Rosaries. They also organized a small show for the children. In this case, too, the work camp was the result of collaboration between Molave Study Center, various social assistance entities and some private donors.
IN PACE
Faithful of Opus Dei and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who died in the first half of the year 2006

In the first half of 2006, 267 faithful of the Prelature and 13 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 and neighbor 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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Torna ai contenuti
A study
"Relativism, Truth, and Faith," by Msgr. Angel Rodriguez Luno

Msgr. Ángel Rodríguez Luño

Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

1. Christian faith and the challenge of relativism

These reflections take as their starting point teachings of Benedict XVI, but make no attempt to offer a complete explanation of his thought on this question.\[1\] On various occasions and in different words, Benedict XVI has expressed his conviction that relativism has become the central problem confronting the Christian faith today.\[2\] Some people in the media have interpreted these words as referring almost exclusively to the area of morality, as though intended to vilify anyone who refuses to accept specific points of the Catholic Church’s moral teaching. But this interpretation is erroneous, since relativism is a much broader and deeper problem, manifested primarily in the philosophical and religious domains. It refers to the deep-seated attitude that contemporary men and women, both believers and non-believers, easily assume in relation to the truth.

The reference to a deep-seated attitude towards the truth distinguishes relativism from error. Error is compatible with a sound attitude towards the truth. A person who affirms, for example, that the Church was not founded by Jesus Christ, may say this because he thinks (mistakenly) that it is the truth and that the opposite thesis is false. The one making an affirmation of this type thinks that it is possible to attain the truth. Those who attain it, and in the degree to which they attain it, are right, and those who sustain the contrary affirmation are mistaken.

Relativistic philosophy, in contrast, claims that we have to resign ourselves to the fact that divine realities and those touching on the deepest meaning of human life, both personal and social, are substantially inaccessible, and that no single approach to them exists. Every epoch, every culture and every religion have used different concepts, images, symbols, metaphors, visions, etc. to express them. These cultural expressions may be opposed to one another, but in relation to the realities to which they refer
they are all of equal value. They are all diverse paths, defined by specific cultures and historical periods, for alluding in a very imperfect way to realities that are essentially unknowable. Thus no conceptual or religious system possesses an absolute truth value. All are relative to their historical moment and cultural context; hence their diversity and even mutual opposition. But within the ambit of this relativity, *all are equally valid, insofar as they are different and complementary ways of approaching the same reality that substantially remains hidden.*

In a book published before his election, Benedict XVI refers to a Buddhist parable.[3] A king in northern India once gathered together a number of blind men who did not know what an elephant was. He had some of the blind men touch the head of the elephant and told them: “This is an elephant.” He said the same thing to the others as he told them to touch the trunk, or the ears, or the feet, or the hairs at the end of the elephant’s tail. Then the king asked the blind men what an elephant was, and each gave a different explanation depending on the part he had been permitted to touch. The blind men began to argue, and the argument became violent, until a fist fight broke out among them, which provided the entertainment the king was seeking.

This story is a good illustration of relativism. Mankind is blind and runs the danger of absolutizing partial and inadequate knowledge, unaware of its intrinsic limitation (the theoretical foundation of relativism). When we fall into this temptation, we are prone to violent and disrespectful behavior, incompatible with human dignity (ethical foundation of relativism). The logical approach would be to accept the relativism of our ideas, not only because this corresponds to the nature of our limited knowledge, but also in virtue of the ethical imperative of tolerance, dialogue and mutual respect. The relativist philosophy presents itself as the necessary requirement for democracy, mutual respect and coexistence. But it fails to take into account that relativism makes possible mockery and abuse by those in power: in the parable, the king who wants to amuse himself at the expense of the poor blind men. In present day society, we can find the same abuse in those who promote their own interests, whether economic, ideological, political, etc., at the cost of others, through skillful
and unscrupulous management of public opinion and the other sources of power.

What does all this have to do with the Christian faith? Quite a lot. For it is essential to Christianity to present itself as religio vera, as the true religion. The Christian faith moves on the plane of truth, which is its “minimal vital space.” The Christian religion is not a myth, nor a conjunction of rites useful for social and political life, nor a principle that inspires sound private sentiments, nor an ethical agency for international cooperation. The Christian faith, first of all, communicates the truth about God, although not exhaustively, and the truth about man and the meaning of his life. The Christian faith is incompatible with the logic of the “as if.” It cannot be reduced to telling ourselves that we have to behave “as if” God had created us, and therefore “as if” all men were brothers. Rather it affirms, as a true claim, that God created heaven and earth and that we are all equally children of God. It also tells us that Christ is the full and definitive revelation of God, “the glory of God and...the very stamp of his nature,” the only mediator between God and mankind. Therefore it cannot accept the view that Christ is simply the form under which God has chosen to reveal himself to Europeans.

We should stress here that coexistence and peaceful dialogue with those who do not have faith, or who sustain other doctrines, is not opposed to Christianity; rather just the opposite is true. What is incompatible with Christian faith is the claim that Christianity, the other monotheistic or non-monotheistic religions, the monistic oriental mysticisms, atheism, etc. are equally true, since they are diverse ways, each limited by specific cultural and historical circumstances, of referring to the same reality, which none manages to truly capture. That is to say, the Christian faith would dissolve if on the theoretical plane one were to lose the perspective of truth according to which those who affirm and deny the same thing cannot be equally right, or be considered as complementary visions of the same reality.

2. Religious relativism

The strength of Christianity, and its power to guide and heal personal and collective life, consists in a close synthesis between faith, reason, and life. Religious faith reveals to each person that true reason is love and that
love is true reason. This synthesis is broken if reason is viewed as relativistic. Thus relativism has become the central problem that evangelization has to confront in our day and age. For relativism brings with it a deeply disordered stance with regard to truth, manifested in all facets of life.

In the first place we find today a relativist interpretation of religion. It is what is known as “the theology of religious pluralism,” which affirms that religious pluralism is not only a *de facto* reality, but a *de jure* one. God is seen as positively wanting non-Christian religions as different paths by which men and women can unite with him and receive salvation, independent of Christ. Christ at most has a position of special importance, but he is only one of many possible paths, and therefore neither exclusive nor inclusive of the rest. All religions are partial ways to God; all can learn from the others something of the truth about God, and in all (or in many of them) one finds a true divine revelation.

This position rests upon the presupposition of the historical and cultural relativity of God’s salvific action in Jesus Christ. The universal salvific action of God is realized through various limited forms, according to the diversity of peoples and cultures, without identifying itself fully with any of them. The absolute truth about God cannot have an adequate and sufficient expression in history and in human language, always limited and relative. Christ’s actions and words are subject to that relativity, in a way analogous to the actions and words of other great religious figures. Christ does not have an absolute and universal value, since nothing that happens in history can have such value. Many different ways exist for trying to explain this view of God’s salvific action.

The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* of Pope John Paul II and the declaration *Dominus Iesus* confront these complex theories. It is easy to see that such theological positions dissolve Christology and relativize Christ’s revelation, which is viewed as limited, incomplete and imperfect, thus opening the way for other independent and autonomous revelations. What holds pride of place in these theories is the ethical imperative of dialogue with the representatives of the great Asian religions, which would not be possible if one did not accept, as a point of departure, that these religions have an autonomous salvific value, not derived from or
directed towards Christ. Also in this case a theoretical (dogmatic) relativism is to a great extent dictated by a practical imperative (that of dialogue).

We should clarify here that what we have just said in no way prejudices the salvation of those without faith in Christ. Non-Christians who live an upright life in accord with their conscience are also saved by Christ and in Christ, although they do not know him here on earth. Christ is the universal Redeemer and Savior of the human race. He is the salvation of all who are saved.

3. Ethical-Social Relativism

We will now go on to consider ethical-social relativism. By this expression we want to point out not only that today’s relativism has many evident manifestations in the ethical-social order, but also, and principally, that it presents itself as justified by ethical-social reasons. This explains both the ease with which it has spread and the ineffectiveness of certain attempts to combat it.

Habermas formulates an ethical-social justification for relativism in the following way. In present-day society we find a pluralism of conceptions of and ways of living the human good. This puts us before a clear alternative: either we renounce the classical pretension of pronouncing value judgments on the various lifestyles that experience offers us, or we renounce defending the ideal of tolerance, according to which every philosophy of life has the same worth as any other, or, at least, all have the same right to exist. [17] The force of this kind of reasoning lies in the fact that historically men have often violently “sacrificed freedom on the altar of truth.” Thus it is easy to seem to be defending freedom, while actually falling into the opposite extreme of violently “sacrificing truth on the altar of freedom.”

This can be clearly seen in the way a relativistic mentality attacks its adversaries. To those who affirm, for example, that heterosexuality is of the essence of marriage, the claim is not made that this thesis is false. Rather those who hold it are accused of religious fundamentalism, intolerance, or an anti-modern spirit. Much less is there any attempt to defend the contrary thesis. The characteristic of the relativist mentality is to say that this thesis is one that happens to exist in society, together with its contrary,
and perhaps with others, and that all of them in the end are of equal value and have the same right to be socially recognized. Those defending relativism don't oblige anyone to get married to a person of the same sex, but anyone who wants to do this should be free to do so. This is the same reasoning used to justify the legalization of abortion and other attacks against the human life of persons who, because of their situation, cannot actively vindicate their rights and whose collaboration is not necessary to us. No one is obliged to have an abortion, but those who want to should be able to attain one.

The relativist mentality is open to many different criticisms. But what one should never do is to reinforce, with one's words or attitudes, what is most persuasive in that mentality. That is to say, whoever attacks relativism should never give the impression that he is disposed to sacrifice freedom on the altar of truth. Rather one should make clear that one is very aware that the move from the theoretical perspective to the ethical-political perspective has to be done with great care. It is one thing to refuse to accept that those who affirm and deny the same thing can be equally correct; quite other is the thesis that only those who think in a particular way should enjoy all the rights of civil freedom under the law. All confusion between the theoretical plane and the ethical-political plane should be avoided. The relationship of conscience with truth is one thing, while justice among people is something quite different. Following this logic one can then show, in a credible way, that in regard to an affirmation that tries to say how the world is, that is, in regard to a speculative thesis, one can only say that it is true or false. Speculative theses are neither strong nor weak, neither private nor public, neither cold nor hot, neither violent nor peaceful, neither authoritarian nor democratic, neither progressive nor conservative, neither good nor bad. They are simply true or false.

What would we think of someone who, when explaining a mathematical proof or giving a medical explanation, would begin by saying that this scientific knowledge only has a private validity, or that it represents a deeply democratic theory? If there is complete certainty that a particular medicine will stop a tumor from growing, one is dealing with a medical truth, and there is nothing more to say. In contrast one can view a way of conceiving civil rights or the structure of the state as authoritarian
or democratic, as just or unjust, as conservative or reformist. At the same
time, there are realities such as marriage which are both an object of true
knowledge and of practical regulation in accord with justice. In case of
conflict, one has to find a way of saving both truth and justice among
persons, for which one has to take into account, among other things, the
“expressive” or educational value of civil laws.[18]

In his address on December 22, 2005, Benedict XVI distinguished very
clearly between the need to defend the truth and the need to seek justice
among men and women. Here is a very significant paragraph: “If religious
freedom were to be considered an expression of the human inability to
discover the truth and thus become a canonization of relativism, then this
social and historical necessity is raised inappropriately to the metaphysical
level and thus stripped of its true meaning. Consequently, it cannot be
accepted by those who believe that the human person is capable of
knowing the truth about God and, on the basis of the inner dignity of the
truth, is bound to this knowledge. It is quite different, on the other hand,
to perceive religious freedom as a need that derives from human
coexistence, or indeed, as an intrinsic consequence of the truth that cannot
be externally imposed but that the person must adopt only through the
process of conviction. The Second Vatican Council, recognizing and
making its own an essential principle of the modern state with the Decree
on Religious Freedom, has recovered the deepest patrimony of the
Church.”[19]

Benedict XVI goes on to say that “those who expected that with this
fundamental ‘yes’ to the modern era all tensions would be dispelled and
that the ‘openness towards the world’ accordingly achieved would
transform everything into pure harmony, had underestimated the inner
tensions as well as the contradictions inherent in the modern epoch. They
had underestimated the perilous frailty of human nature which has been a
threat to human progress in all the periods of history.” And while affirming
that “the Council could not have intended to abolish the Gospel’s
opposition to human dangers and errors,”[20] he also said that one needs to
strive to do everything possible to overcome “erroneous or superfluous
contradictions in order to present to our world the requirement of the
Gospel in its full greatness and purity.”[21] And he stressed that “the steps
the Council took towards the modern era which had rather vaguely been presented as ‘openness to the world,’ belong in short to the perennial problem of the relationship between faith and reason that is re-emerging in ever-new forms.”[22]

4. Anthropological problems of relativism

We have said that relativism in the ethical-social terrain stems from a practical motive: permitting people to do whatever they desire, as long as it doesn’t harm others, which is seen as an expansion of freedom. But the relativistic mentality brings with it a deep anthropological disorder, with steep personal and social costs. Here I will mention only two aspects of this complex problem.

The first is that the relativist mentality is united to an excessive accentuation of the technical dimension of the human intellect and of the impulses connected to the expansion of the ego with which this dimension of the intellect is related, with the corresponding suppression of the intellect’s sapiential dimension.

What is here referred to as “the technical dimension of the human intellect,” which other authors call by different names,[23] is the activity of the intellect that permits us to orientate ourselves in our surroundings, guarantying the satisfaction of our basic necessities. The intellect forms concepts, discovers relationships, recognizes the order of things, etc. for the purpose of controlling and exploiting nature, making tools and obtaining the resources that we need. Thanks to this function of the intellect the objects and forces of nature become objects that we can control and manipulate for our own benefit. From this perspective, to know is power: power to control, power to manipulate, power to live better.

The sapiential function of the intellect, in contrast, seeks to understand the meaning of the world and human life. It develops concepts not for the purpose of controlling but to attain truths about the world that can give a sound answer to the question of the meaning of our existence, an answer that in the long run is as necessary to us as bread and water.

The systematic flight from the plane of truth, which we have termed the relativist mentality, brings with it an imbalance between these two functions of the intellect. The predominance of the technical functions
means the predominance at the personal and cultural level of impulses towards the values of pleasure, well-being, possession, absence of sacrifice, etc., by means of which the individual ego is affirmed and expanded. The suppression of the sapiential function of the intellect brings with it the inhibition of the social and altruistic tendencies, and above all a diminishing of the capacity for self-transcendence, as a result of which the person becomes enclosed within the limits of egoistic individualism. Thus the thirst to accumulate, to triumph, to relax and amuse oneself, to live easily and pleasantly, easily prevails over the desire to know, to reflect, to give meaning to what one does, to help others by means of one’s work, to transcend the narrow limits of our immediate interests.

The second problem is closely linked with the first. The lack of sensitivity towards the truth and towards questions related to the meaning of human life leads to the deformation, if not the corruption, of freedom—of one’s own freedom first of all. It is no surprise that social and legal expressions of lifestyles congruent with this anthropological disorder are always based on a call for freedom, a reality which is certainly sacrosanct, but which has to be understood in its true meaning. People invoke freedom as freedom to abort, freedom to be misinformed, freedom to be vile, freedom to refuse to give any reason for one’s own positions, freedom to annoy others and, above all, freedom to impose on others a relativist philosophy. Anyone who refuses to accept this philosophy is subjected to a process of social and cultural “lynching”—the “dictatorship of relativism” pointed to by Benedict XVI.

All this also has many negative implications for the Christian faith. Anyone who thinks that truth exists, and can be attained with certainty even in the midst of many difficulties; anyone who thinks that our capacity to culturally model love, marriage, life, the order of coexistence in the state, etc., is subject to limits that can’t be violated, holds that there exists an intellect beyond the human intellect. It is the Creator’s intellect that determines the purposes of natural beings and limits our power to change them. The relativist thinks the contrary. Relativism is like agnosticism. Anyone who follows it to the end will find himself much closer to practical atheism. It seems to me that the conviction that God created man and woman is incompatible with the idea that marriage between persons of the
same sex is possible.\(^{[24]}\) It would only be possible if marriage were simply a cultural creation structured centuries ago in one way, which we are free to restructure now in another way.

Relativism responds to a radical conception of life which it tries to impose on everyone. The dogma of relativism affirms that the way to attain the greatest possible happiness in this conflicted world of ours, which is always a limited and fragmentary happiness, is to evade the problem of truth, viewed as a useless complication and the cause of many headaches.\(^{[25]}\) Relativism is a dogmatic philosophy of happiness. As such it comes up against the problem that men and women possess an intellect, and that we cannot be happy without knowing the meaning of our life. Aristotle began his *Metaphysics* by saying that every person, by nature, desires to know.\(^{[26]}\) And Christ taught that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”\(^{[27]}\)

No coercive force can eliminate from human life the desire to know, or hunger for the word that proceeds from God’s mouth. Therefore I am convinced that ours is a time of hope, and that the future is much more promising than it might appear, provided that those who seek the truth can show others a life that is richer and more human than the life offered by relativism. And this undoubtedly is also a challenge for those who want to help spread the Christian faith in today’s world.

\(^{[1]}\) We will focus on the following texts: Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2004; homily at the *Missa pro eligendo Romano Pontifice* celebrated in the Vatican Basilica on April 18, 2005; and the important Christmas Address of Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia, December 22, 2005.

\(^{[2]}\) Cf. for example Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 117. See also the homily mentioned above, given on April 18, 2005.


\(^{[5]}\) The knowledge of God that faith gives us is not exhaustive because in heaven we will know God much better. Nevertheless, what Revelation
tells us is true, and it is all that God wanted to tell us about himself. There is no other source to know more truths about God nor are there other revelations.


[7] Cf. 1 Tim 2:5

[8] This thesis was defended at the beginning of the twentieth century by Ernst Troeltsch Cf. *Die Absolutheit des Christentums and die Religionsgeschichte*, Mohr, Tübingen, 1929.

[9] This idea is found throughout *Truth and Tolerance*.


[12] Some claim that the Word not incarnated, Lógos ásarkos or Lógos cosmico, carries out a much broader salvific action than that of the Word Incarnate, the Logos ensarkos (cf. for example Jacques Dupuis, *Verso una teologia del pluralism religioso*, Queriniana, Brescia 2997, p. 404). Others claim that the Holy Spirit carries out a salvific action that is separate from that of Christ, attributing the autonomous salvific value of the non-Christian religions and the true revelation contained in them to the Holy Spirit.


[18] The “expressive” aspect of civil laws refers to the undeniable fact that the law, in addition to permitting or forbidding something, expresses a conception of human life and marriage, and thus has an educational impact of either a positive or negative character.


[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Philipp Lersch calls it the intellectual function of the intellect, and terms what we call the “sapiential dimension” the spiritual function of the intellect. Cf. Lersch, Philipp, Ph., La estructura de la personalidad, 4th ed., Scientia, Barcelona 1963, pp. 399-404.


[25] The ethical thesis of Greek skepticism is once again resurfacing today: “Whoever holds that something is by nature good or evil, or in general obligatory or prohibited, is subject to many anxieties...If the conviction that some things by nature are either good or bad produces anxiety, then it is also bad to assume and hold firmly that something is objectively bad or good.” (Sexto Empírico, Esbozos pirronicos, Biblioteca Clasica Gredos, Madrid 1993, III, pp. 237-238). For a critique of this position, cf. Antonio Rodríguez Luño, Ética General, 5th ed., Eunsa, Pamplona 2004, pp. 134-138.

[27] *Mt* 4:4.