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

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

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

• On the Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis

HOLY SEE

_The Roman Pontiff_

• Homily at the Inauguration of the Fifth Conference of the Latin American Bishop (May 13, 2007)
• Homily on the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29, 2007)
• Address at Meeting with Young People in São Paulo (May 10, 2007)
• Homily on the Solemnity of Our Lady, Mother of God, 40th World Day of Peace (January 1, 2007)
• Homily at the Mass in Suffrage for John Paul II (April 2, 2007)
• Homily at the Easter Vigil (April 7, 2007)
• Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as a font and culmination of the life and mission of the Church, Sacramentum Caritatis (February 22, 2007)

PRELATE

_New Circumscriptions_

• New circumscriptions

_Appointments_

• Appointments

_Actions of the Prelate_

• Pastoral Trips
  • Publication of the book: Por Cristo, con El, y en El

_Pastoral Letters_

• Letter of January 2007
• Letter of May 2007

_Homilies_

• On the Feast of St. Josemaría, St. Eugene’s Basilica, Rome (June 26, 2007)
• At the Mass of thanksgiving for the dedication of a street to St. Josemaría, Fiuggi, Italy (June 23, 2007)
• At the priestly ordination of faithful of the Prelature, St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome (May 26, 2007)
• At the Mass In Cena Domini, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 5, 2007)
• At the Easter Vigil, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 7, 2007)
• At the Mass in suffrage for the soul of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome (March 23, 2007)

Articles and Interviews
• Lenten Conference The Eucharist, Mystery of Light, Basilica of St. Mary Major, Rome (March 29, 2007)
• On the 80th birthday of Benedict XVI (April 16, 2007)

ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
• The Feast of St. Josemaría Escriva throughout the world
• Dedication of a street to St. Josemaría in Fiuggi (Italy)
• A statue on the campus of the University of La Sabana (Colombia)
• The 80th anniversary of the first Mass of St. Josemaría in Madrid
• A parish church of St. Josemaría in Valencia, Spain
• A commemorative plaque honoring St. Josemaría in Logroño, Spain

NEWS
• New Centers of the Prelature
• Other News
• Presentation of the book Jesus of Nazareth
• Masses in suffrage for the soul of Don Álvaro

INITIATIVES
• Crotona Center

In Brief
• Amajari (Brazil) -- Volunteer project in the Amazon region
• Bodjondè (Togo) -- The Takeli Foundation: Inauguration of a new school
• Rome (Italy) -- Secretary General of the CGIL visits Centro ELIS
• Dreistetten (Austria) -- Priests’ Meeting in Tagungshaus Hohewand
• Abidjan (Ivory Coast) -- Project Wassa
• Rome (Italy) -- Pastry and volunteering
• Kreuzweingarten (Germany) -- A symposium on domestic finances
• Paris (France) -- The Church in the face of violence
• Sydney (Australia) -- "You shall be my witnesses"
• Montevideo (Uruguay) -- Making good use of summer
• Bogotá (Colombia) -- Introductory Program for Family Orientation Moderators
• Madrid (Spain) -- Mozart for Mexico
• Mexico City (Mexico) -- Mediterranean ports

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 2007

A STUDY

• The Church’s Mission and Temporal Realities
EDITORIAL
On the Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis

The three parts into which Benedict XVI divides his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis reflect the harmony between dogma, liturgy, and life. The Eucharist is a mystery that has to be believed, celebrated, and lived. The considerations that follow focus on the relation between faith and celebration, and between celebration and life. Both themes are very present in the preaching and teaching of the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá.

Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes that the Synod of Bishops, whose conclusions gave rise to this Apostolic Exhortation, “reflected a great deal on the intrinsic relation between Eucharistic faith and celebration.”[1] The faith of the Church, said the Pope, “is nourished in a special way at the table of the Eucharist.”[2]

To ensure that the faithful’s participation in the Eucharist leads to an effective growth in their faith and strengthens their divine life, it is important that the celebration of the rite be done well. This is perhaps one of the central teachings of this document. A refined obedience to the liturgical norms shows that the faith that is celebrated is the faith that is believed. Through obedience to its rites, the Church guarantees a harmony between the faith that is believed and the faith that is celebrated. As Benedict XVI pointed out: “for two thousand years this way of celebrating has sustained the faith life of all believers, called to take part in the celebration as the People of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (cf. 1 Pet 2:5, 9).”[3]

Through fidelity to the rites, the minister shows that the Eucharist is, more than a human work, a divine action. The careful following of gestures and signs, in accord with the cadence and order prescribed by the liturgy, expresses “on the part of the minister, a docile openness to receiving this ineffable gift.”[4] Thus the liturgical norms help the celebrating minister as well as those participating to adequately situate themselves in regard to the sacred action that is being carried out.
The liturgical rhythm expresses in a special way the serene beauty of God’s love. “The simplicity of its gestures and the sobriety of its orderly sequence of signs communicate and inspire more than any contrived and inappropriate additions.”[5] The beauty in the liturgy is an expression of God’s glory, a reflection of heaven upon earth. The liturgy is a divine rather than a human action. It is a gift received which, as a divine action, is not subject to our whims or to current fashions.[6]

The Pope insists that “the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well.”[7] A Christian who marvels at the mystery being celebrated will grow in his spirit of adoration and piety. The careful celebration of the liturgy will lead him to God.[8]

After considering the relationship between faith as believed and faith as celebrated, so important for fostering authentic participation by the faithful, the Exhortation offers a new opportunity to consider the profound relationship between the Eucharist and Christian life. The Holy Father refers to the Eucharist as the sacrament of charity, thus emphasizing the relationship between the sacrament of the Eucharist and Christian love, both love for God and love for neighbor.[9] Some words of St. Josemaría are quite germane here: “Keep struggling, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the center and the root of your interior life, and so your whole day will turn into an act of worship—an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. Your whole day will then be an act of worship that overflows in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and the offering up of your professional work and your family life.”[10]

The relationship between the Eucharist, Christian life and apostolic mission, is central to the teachings of St. Josemaría. Eucharistic faith has to be present and operative not only in the moment of the celebration, but should embrace one’s whole life. As he vigorously affirmed, being a Catholic can never mean simply “going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, being taken up with ecclesiastical matters, in a kind of segregated world, which is considered to be the ante–chamber of heaven, while the ordinary world follows its own separate path.”[11] On the contrary, ordinary life is the true setting for one’s Christian life: “where your fellow
men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ.”[12]

These words of the founder of Opus Dei, spoken forty years ago in the context of an open-air celebration of the Eucharist, can help us to understand the relationship between the Eucharist and life. The Pope in his Apostolic Exhortation insists that the Eucharist, “as a mystery to be ‘lived,’ meets each of us as we are, and makes our concrete existence the place where we experience daily the radical newness of the Christian life.”[13] The laity, specifically, are called to carry out their Christian vocation in the setting of their daily life. Conformed to Christ through the Eucharist, their mission is to be witnesses to God’s love in their ordinary life, and particularly in their work and family.

The divine life that stems from the Eucharist is, therefore, inseparable from our apostolic mission, as the Holy Father says when commenting on the words *Ite misa est* with which the sacred minister greets the faithful at the conclusion of the celebration: “These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church. The People of God might be helped to understand more clearly this essential dimension of the Church’s life, taking the dismissal as a starting-point.”[14] The founder of Opus Dei expressed this relationship between life and mission very succinctly: “Your apostolate must be the overflow of your life ‘within.’”[15] The Church’s mission is to spread the life and the charity of Christ, which flows forth from the Eucharist as from its source. The Apostolic Exhortation is a reflection on the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission, that is, the sanctification of the world.

*Sacramentum Caritatis* is thus a good opportunity to appreciate the gift of the Eucharist with renewed gratitude and to understand more fully the connection between the Eucharist and Christian life.

[1] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 34.


[7] Ibid., no. 64.


[12] Ibid.


[14] Ibid., no. 51.


Back to Contents
HOLY SEE

• The Roman Pontiff
The Roman Pontiff

Homily at the Inauguration of the Fifth Conference of the Latin American Bishop (May 13, 2007)

Dear Brother Bishops,

Dear priests, and all of you, brothers and sisters in the Lord!

There are no words to express my joy in being here with you to celebrate this solemn Eucharist on the occasion of the opening of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. I greet each of you most warmly, particularly Archbishop Raymundo Damasceno Assis, whom I thank for the words he addressed to me in the name of the entire assembly, and the Cardinal Presidents of this General Conference. My respectful greeting goes to the civil and military Authorities who have honored us with their presence. From this Shrine my thoughts reach out, full of affection and prayer, to all those who are spiritually united with us, especially the communities of consecrated life, the young people belonging to various associations and movements, the families, and also the sick and the elderly. To all I say: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:3).

I see it as a special gift of Providence that this Holy Mass is being celebrated at this time and in this place. The time is the liturgical season of Easter; on this Sixth Sunday of Easter, as Pentecost rapidly approaches, the Church is called to intensify her prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The place is the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, the Marian heart of Brazil: Mary welcomes us to this Upper Room and, as our Mother and Teacher, helps us to pray trustingly to God with one voice. This liturgical celebration lays a most solid foundation for the Fifth Conference, setting it on the firm basis of prayer and the Eucharist, Sacramentum Caritatis. Only the love of Christ, poured out by the Holy Spirit, can make this meeting an authentic ecclesial event, a moment of grace for this Continent and for the whole world. This afternoon I will be able to discuss more fully the implications of the theme of your Conference. But now, let
us leave space for the word of God which we have the joy of receiving with open and docile hearts, like Mary, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ may once again take flesh in the “today” of our history.

The first reading, taken from the *Acts of the Apostles*, refers to the so-called “Council of Jerusalem”, which dealt with the question as to whether the observance of the Mosaic Law was to be imposed on those pagans who had become Christians. The reading leaves out the discussion between “the apostles and the elders” (vv. 4-21) and reports the final decision, which was then written down in the form of a letter and entrusted to two delegates for delivery to the community in Antioch (vv. 22-29). This passage from Acts is highly appropriate for us, since we too are assembled here for an ecclesial meeting. It reminds us of the importance of community discernment with regard to the great problems and issues encountered by the Church along her way. These are clarified by the “apostles” and “elders” in the light of the Holy Spirit, who, as today’s Gospel says, calls to mind the teaching of Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:26) and thus helps the Christian community to advance in charity towards the fullness of truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13). The Church’s leaders discuss and argue, but in a constant attitude of religious openness to Christ’s word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently, at the end they can say: “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us…” (*Acts* 15:28).

This is the “method” by which we operate in the Church, whether in small gatherings or in great ones. It is not only question of procedure: it is a reflection of the Church’s very nature as a mystery of communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit. In the case of the General Conferences of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, the first, held in 1955 in Rio de Janeiro, merited a special Letter from Pope Pius XII, of venerable memory; in later Conferences, including the present one, the Bishop of Rome has traveled to the site of the continental gathering in order to preside over its initial phase. With gratitude and devotion let us remember the Servants of God Paul VI and John Paul II, who brought to the Conferences of Medellín, Puebla and Santo Domingo the witness of the closeness of the universal Church to the Churches in Latin America, which constitute, proportionally, the majority of the Catholic community.
“To the Holy Spirit and to us”. This is the Church: we, the community of believers, the People of God, with its Pastors who are called to lead the way; together with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father, sent in the name of his Son Jesus, the Spirit of the one who is “greater” than all, given to us through Christ, who became “small” for our sake. The Paraclete Spirit, our Ad- vocatus, Defender and Consoler, makes us live in God’s presence, as hearers of his word, freed from all anxiety and fear, bearing in our hearts the peace which Jesus left us, the peace that the world cannot give (cf. Jn 14:26-27). The Spirit accompanies the Church on her long pilgrimage between Christ’s first and second coming. “I go away, and I will come to you” (Jn 14:28), Jesus tells his Apostles. Between Christ’s “going away” and his “return” is the time of the Church, his Body. Two thousand years have passed so far, including these five centuries and more in which the Church has made her pilgrim way on the American Continent, filling believers with Christ’s life through the sacraments and sowing in these lands the good seed of the Gospel, which has yielded thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. The time of the Church, the time of the Spirit: the Spirit is the Teacher who trains disciples: he teaches them to love Jesus; he trains them to hear his word and to contemplate his countenance; he conforms them to Christ’s sacred humanity, a humanity which is poor in spirit, afflicted, meek, hungry for justice, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking, persecuted for justice’s sake (cf. Mt 5:3-10). By the working of the Holy Spirit, Jesus becomes the “Way” along which the disciple walks. “If a man loves me, he will keep my word”, Jesus says at the beginning of today’s Gospel. “The word which you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me” (Jn 14:23-24). Just as Jesus makes known the words of the Father, so the Spirit reminds the Church of Christ’s own words (cf. Jn 14:26). And just as love of the Father led Jesus to feed on his will, so our love for Jesus is shown by our obedience to his words. Jesus’ fidelity to the Father’s will can be communicated to his disciples through the Holy Spirit, who pours the love of God into their hearts (cf. Rom 5:5).

The New Testament presents Christ as the missionary of the Father. Especially in the Gospel of John, Jesus often speaks of himself in relation to the Father who sent him into the world. And so in today’s Gospel he says: “the word which you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me” (Jn 14:24). At this moment, dear friends, we are invited to turn our gaze to
him, for the Church’s mission exists only as a prolongation of Christ’s mission: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21). The evangelist stresses, in striking language, that the passing on of this commission takes place in the Holy Spirit: “he breathed on them and said to them: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:22). Christ’s mission is accomplished in love. He has kindled in the world the fire of God’s love (cf. Lk 12:49). It is Love that gives life: and so the Church has been sent forth to spread Christ’s Love throughout the world, so that individuals and peoples “may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). To you, who represent the Church in Latin America, today I symbolically entrust my Encyclical Deus Caritas Est, in which I sought to point out to everyone the essence of the Christian message. The Church considers herself the disciple and missionary of this Love: missionary only insofar as she is a disciple, capable of being attracted constantly and with renewed wonder by the God who has loved us and who loves us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10). The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by “attraction”: just as Christ “draws all to himself” by the power of his love, culminating in the sacrifice of the Cross, so the Church fulfils her mission to the extent that, in union with Christ, she accomplishes every one of her works in spiritual and practical imitation of the love of her Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters! This is the priceless treasure that is so abundant in Latin America, this is her most precious inheritance: faith in the God who is Love, who has shown us his face in Jesus Christ. You believe in the God who is Love: this is your strength, which overcomes the world, the joy that nothing and no one can ever take from you, the peace that Christ won for you by his Cross! This is the faith that has made America the “Continent of Hope.” Not a political ideology, not a social movement, not an economic system: faith in the God who is Love—who took flesh, died and rose in Jesus Christ—is the authentic basis for this hope which has brought forth such a magnificent harvest from the time of the first evangelization until today, as attested by the ranks of Saints and Beati whom the Spirit has raised up throughout the Continent. Pope John Paul II called you to a new evangelization, and you accepted his commission with your customary generosity and commitment. I now confirm it with you, and in the words of this Fifth Conference I say to you: be faithful disciples, so as to be courageous and effective missionaries.
The second reading sets before us the magnificent vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is an image of awesome beauty, where nothing is superfluous, but everything contributes to the perfect harmony of the holy City. In his vision John sees the city “coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (Rev 21:10). And since the glory of God is Love, the heavenly Jerusalem is the icon of the Church, utterly holy and glorious, without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph 5:27), permeated at her heart and in every part of her by the presence of the God who is Love. She is called a “bride”, “the bride of the Lamb” (Rev 20:9), because in her is fulfilled the nuptial figure which pervades biblical revelation from beginning to end. The City and Bride is the locus of God’s full communion with humanity; she has no need of a temple or of any external source of light, because the indwelling presence of God and of the Lamb illuminates her from within.

This magnificent icon has an eschatological value: it expresses the mystery of the beauty that is already the essential form of the Church, even if it has not yet arrived at its fullness. It is the goal of our pilgrimage, the homeland which awaits us and for which we long. Seeing that beauty with the eyes of faith, contemplating it and yearning for it, must not serve as an excuse for avoiding the historical reality in which the Church lives as she shares the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted (cf. Constitution Gaudium et Spes, 1). If the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem is the glory of God—his love in other words—then it is in charity, and in charity alone, that we can approach it and to a certain degree dwell within it even now. Whoever loves the Lord Jesus and keeps his word, already experiences in this world the mysterious presence of the Triune God. We heard this in the Gospel: “we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23). Every Christian is therefore called to become a living stone of this splendid “dwelling place of God with men”. What a magnificent vocation!

A Church totally enlivened and impelled by the love of Christ, the Lamb slain for love, is the image within history of the heavenly Jerusalem, prefiguring the holy city that is radiant with the glory of God. It releases an irresistible missionary power which is the power of holiness. Through the prayers of the Virgin Mary, may the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean be abundantly clothed with power from on high (cf. Lk 24:49),
in order to spread throughout this Continent and the whole world the holiness of Christ. To him be glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

Homily on the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29, 2007)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Yesterday afternoon, I went to the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, where I celebrated First Vespers for today's Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Beside the sepulcher of the Apostle to the Gentiles I paid homage to his memory and announced the Pauline Year which, on the occasion of the bimillennium of his birth, will be celebrated from June 28, 2008 until June 29, 2009.

This morning we have gathered round the sepulcher of St Peter in accordance with tradition. Present here to receive the Pallium are the Metropolitan Archbishops appointed during the past year, to whom I extend my special greeting. Also present, sent by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, is an eminent Delegation; I welcome it with cordial gratitude, thinking back to last November 30 when I was in Istanbul-Constantinople for the Feast of St. Andrew.

I greet the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima and the Deacon Andreas. Welcome, dear Brothers! The visits we pay each other every year are a sign that the search for full communion is always present and desired by the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Bishop of Rome.

Today's Feast offers me the opportunity to meditate once again on Peter's confession, the decisive moment in the journey of the disciples with Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels have it take place in the district of Caesarea Philippi (cf. Mt 16:13-20; Mk 8: 27-30; Lk 9:18-22).
John, for his part, keeps for us another important confession by Peter, after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and Jesus’ Address in the Synagogue of Capernaum (cf. Jn 6:66-70). Matthew, in the text just proclaimed, recalls Jesus’ attribution of the nickname Cephas, “Rock,” to Simon. Jesus said that he desired to build his Church “on this rock” and with this in view, conferred on Peter the power of the keys (cf. Mt 16:17-19). It clearly emerges from these accounts that Peter’s confession is inseparable from his pastoral duty to Christ’s flock which was entrusted to him.

According to all the Evangelists, Simon’s confession takes place at a crucial moment in Jesus’ life when, after preaching in Galilee, he resolutely set out for Jerusalem in order to bring his saving mission to completion with his death on the Cross and his Resurrection. The disciples were involved in this decision: Jesus invited them to make a choice that would bring them to distinguish themselves from the crowd so as to become the community of those who believed in him, his “family,” the beginning of the Church.

In fact, there are two ways of “seeing” and “knowing” Jesus: one—that of the crowd—is more superficial; the other—that of the disciples—more penetrating and genuine. With his twofold question: “What do the people say?” and “who do you say that I am?” Jesus invited the disciples to become aware of this different perspective. The people thought that Jesus was a prophet. This was not wrong, but it does not suffice; it is inadequate. In fact, it was a matter of delving deep, of recognizing the uniqueness of the person of Jesus of Nazareth and his newness.

This is how it still is today: many people draw near to Jesus, as it were, from the outside. Great scholars recognize his spiritual and moral stature and his influence on human history, comparing him to Buddha, Confucius, Socrates and other wise and important historical figures. Yet they do not manage to recognize him in his uniqueness. What Jesus said to Philip at the Last Supper springs to mind: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip?” (Jn 14: 9).

Jesus is often also considered as one of the great founders of a religion from which everyone may take something in order to form his or her own
conviction. Today too, “people” have different opinions about Jesus, just as they did then. And as he did then, Jesus also repeats his question to us, his disciples today: “And who do you say that I am?” Let us make Peter’s answer our own. According to the Gospel of Mark he said: “You are the Christ” (8: 29); in Luke, the affirmation is: “The Christ of God” (Lk 9: 20); in Matthew resounds, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16: 16); finally, in John: “You are the Holy One of God.” These are all correct answers which are also right for us.

Let us reflect on Matthew’s text in particular, quoted by today’s liturgy. According to certain experts, the formula which appears there presupposes the post-Resurrection context and might even be connected with a personal appearance of the Risen Jesus to Peter, an appearance similar to that which Paul experienced on the road to Damascus.

In fact, the responsibility conferred on Peter by the Lord was rooted in the personal relationship which the Jesus of history had with Simon the fisherman, from his first meeting with him when he said to him “So you are Simon... You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter)” (Jn 1:42). The Evangelist John emphasizes it, he who was also a fisherman and an associate, together with his brother James, of the two brothers, Simon and Andrew. The Jesus who called Saul after the Resurrection is the same Jesus who—still immersed in history—after his baptism in the Jordan approached the four brother fishermen who were then disciples of the Baptist (cf. Jn 1:35-42).

He sought them out on the shores of Lake Galilee and called them to follow him, to become “fishers of men” (cf. Mk 1:16-20). He then entrusted Peter with a specific task, thereby recognizing in him a special gift of faith from the heavenly Father. Of course, all this was then illumined by the Paschal experience, but always remaining firmly anchored in the historical events prior to Easter.

The parallel between Peter and Paul cannot diminish the importance of Simon’s historical journey with his Master and Lord, who from the outset attributed to him the characteristic of the “rock” on which he intended to build his new community, the Church.
In the Synoptic Gospels Peter’s confession is always followed by Jesus’ announcement of his imminent Passion. Peter reacted to this announcement because he was not yet able to understand. Nonetheless, this was a fundamental element on which Jesus strongly insisted. Indeed, the titles attributed to him by Peter—you are “the Christ,” “the Christ of God,” “the Son of the living God”—can only be properly understood in light of the mystery of his death and Resurrection.

And the opposite is also true: the event of the Cross reveals its full meaning only if “this man” who suffered and died on the Cross “truly was the Son of God,” to use the words uttered by the centurion as he stood before the Crucified Christ (cf. Mk 15:39). These texts clearly say that the integrity of the Christian faith stems from the confession of Peter, illumined by the teaching of Jesus on his “way” toward glory, that is, on his absolutely unique way, being the Messiah and the Son of God.

It was a narrow “way,” a shocking “manner” for the disciples of every age, who are inevitably led to think according to men rather than according to God (cf. Mt 16:23). Today too, as in Jesus’ day, it does not suffice to possess the proper confession of faith: it is always necessary to learn anew from the Lord the actual way in which he is Saviour and the path on which we must follow him. Indeed, we have to recognize that even for believers, the Cross is always hard to accept.

Instinct impels one to avoid it and the tempter leads one to believe that it is wiser to be concerned with saving oneself rather than losing one’s life through faithfulness to love, faithfulness to the Son of God made man. Who do you say I am? What was it that the people to whom Jesus was speaking found hard to accept? What continues to be hard for many people also in our time?

It is difficult to accept that he claimed not only to be one of the prophets but the Son of God, and that he claimed God’s own authority for himself. Listening to him preaching, seeing him heal the sick, evangelize the lowly and the poor and reconcile sinners, little by little the disciples came to realize that he was the Messiah in the most exalted sense of the word, that is, not only a man sent by God, but God himself made man.
Clearly, all this was far beyond them, it exceeded their capacity for understanding. They were able to express their faith with the titles of the Judaic tradition: “Christ,” “Son of God,” “Lord.” However, to adhere truly to reality, these titles had in some way to be rediscovered in their most profound truth: Jesus himself revealed their true meaning with his life, ever surprising, even paradoxical considering the customary concepts. And the faith of the disciples itself had to progressively adapt. It presents itself as a pilgrimage which begins in the experience of the historical Jesus, finds its foundation in the Paschal Mystery, but must then advance further thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit.

This was also the faith of the Church in the course of history, this is also our faith as Christians of today. Firmly resting on the “rock” of Peter, it is a pilgrimage toward the fullness of that truth which the Fisherman of Galilee professed with passionate conviction: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Mt 16:16).

In Peter’s profession of faith, dear brothers and sisters, we can feel that we are all one, despite the divisions that have wounded the Church’s unity down the centuries and whose consequences are still being felt. Today, in the name of Sts. Peter and Paul, let us renew, together with our Brothers who have come from Constantinople—whom I thank once again for their presence at our celebration—our commitment to accept to the very end the desire of Christ, who wants us to be fully united.

With the concelebrating Archbishops, let us accept the gift and responsibility of communion between the See of Peter and the Metropolitan Churches entrusted to their pastoral care.

May the Holy Mother of God always guide us and accompany us with her intercession: may her unswerving faith, which sustained the faith of Peter and of the other Apostles, continue to sustain that of the Christian generations, our own faith: Queen of Apostles, pray for us! Amen.

Back to Contents
Address at Meeting with Young People in São Paulo (May 10, 2007)

My dear young friends!

“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor…and come, follow me” (Mt 19:21).

1. I was particularly eager to include a meeting with you during this my first journey to Latin America. I have come to inaugurate the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America which, according to my wish, will take place at Aparecida, here in Brazil, at the Shrine of Our Lady. It is she who leads us to the feet of Jesus so that we can learn his teachings about the Kingdom, and it is she who stirs us up to be his missionaries so that the people of this “Continent of Hope” may have full life in him.

In their General Assembly last year, your Bishops here in Brazil reflected on the theme of the evangelization of youth and they placed a document into your hands. They asked you to receive that document and add your own reflections to it in the course of the year. At their most recent Assembly, the Bishops returned to the theme, enriched now by your collaboration, in the hope that the reflections and guidelines proposed therein would serve as a stimulus and a beacon for your journey. The words offered by the Archbishop of São Paulo and the Director of Pastoral Care for Young People, both of whom I thank, confirm the spirit that moves your hearts.

While flying over the land of Brazil yesterday evening, I was already anticipating our encounter here in the Stadium of Pacaembu, anxious to extend to all of you a warm Brazilian embrace and to share with you the sentiments which I carry in the depths of my heart, and which are very appropriately indicated to us in today’s Gospel.

I have always felt a very special joy at these encounters. I remember especially the Twentieth World Youth Day at which I was able to preside two years ago in Germany. Some of you gathered here today were also present! It is an emotional memory for me on account of the abundant fruits of the Lord’s grace poured out upon those who were there. Among the many fruits which I could point to, there is little doubt that the first was
the exemplary sense of fraternity that stood as a clear witness to the Church’s perennial vitality throughout the world.

2. For this reason, my dear friends, I am certain that today the same impressions I received in Germany will be renewed here. In 1991, during his visit to Mato Grosso, the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, of venerable memory, said that “youth are the first protagonists of the third millennium … they are the ones who will be charged with the destiny of this new phase in human history” (16 October 1991). Today, I feel moved to make the same observation regarding all of you.

The Christian life you lead in numerous parishes and small ecclesial communities, in universities, colleges and schools, and most of all, in places of work both in the city and in the countryside, is undoubtedly pleasing to the Lord. But it is necessary to go even further. We can never say “enough,” because the love of God is infinite, and the Lord asks us—or better—requires us to open our hearts wider so that there will be room for even more love, goodness, and understanding for our brothers and sisters, and for the problems which concern not only the human community, but also the effective preservation and protection of the natural environment of which we are all a part. “Our forests have more life”: do not allow this flame of hope which your National Hymn places on your lips to die out. The devastation of the environment in the Amazon Basin and the threats against the human dignity of peoples living within that region call for greater commitment in the different areas of activity than society tends to recognize.

3. Today I would like to reflect on the text we have just heard from Saint Matthew (cf. 19:16-22). It speaks of a young man who ran to see Jesus. His impatience merits special attention. In this young man I see all of you young people of Brazil and Latin America. You have “run” here from various regions of this Continent for this meeting of ours. You want to listen to the words of Jesus himself—spoken through the voice of the Pope.

You have a crucial question—a question that appears in this Gospel—to put to him. It is the same question posed by the young man who ran to see Jesus: *What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?* I would like to take a deeper look at this question with you. It has to do with life. A life which—in all of you—is exuberant and beautiful. What are you to do
with it? How can you live it to the full?

We see at once that in the very formulation of the question, the “here” and “now” are not enough; to put it another way, we cannot limit our life within the confines of space and time, however much we might try to broaden their horizons. Life transcends them. In other words: we want to live, not die. We have a sense of something telling us that life is eternal and that we must apply ourselves to reach it. In short, it rests in our hands and is dependent, in a certain way, on our own decision.

The question in the Gospel does not regard only the future. It does not regard only a question about what will happen after death. On the contrary, it exists as a task in the present, in the “here” and “now,” which must guarantee authenticity and consequently the future. In short, the young man’s question raises the issue of life’s meaning. It can therefore be formulated in this way: what must I do so that my life has meaning? How must I live so as to reap the full fruits of life? Or again: what must I do so that my life is not wasted?

Jesus alone can give us the answer, because he alone can guarantee us eternal life. He alone, therefore, can show us the meaning of this present life and give it fullness.

4. But before giving his response, Jesus asks about a very important aspect of the young man’s enquiry: why do you ask me about what is good? In this question, we find the key to the answer. This young man perceives that Jesus is good and that he is a teacher—a teacher who does not deceive. We are here because we have the very same conviction: Jesus is good. It may be that we do not know how to explain fully the reason for this perception, but it undoubtedly draws us to him and opens us up to his teaching: he is a good teacher. To recognize the good means to love. And whoever loves—to use a felicitous expression of Saint John—knows God (cf. 1 Jn 4:7). The young man in the Gospel has perceived God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus assures us that God alone is good. To be open to goodness means to receive God. In this way, he invites us to see God in all things and in everything that happens, even where most people see only God’s absence. When we see the beauty of creation and recognize the goodness present
there, it is impossible not to believe in God and to experience his saving and reassuring presence. If we came to see all the good that exists in the world—and moreover, experience the good that comes from God himself—we would never cease to approach him, praise him, and thank him. He continually fills us with joy and good things. His joy is our strength.

But we can only know in an imperfect, partial way. To understand what is good, we need help, which the Church offers us on many occasions, especially through catechesis. Jesus himself shows what is good for us by giving us the first element in his catechesis: “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17). He begins with the knowledge that the young man has surely already acquired from his family and from the synagogue: he knows the commandments. These lead to life, which means that they guarantee our authenticity. They are the great signs which lead us along the right path. Whoever keeps the commandments is on the way that leads to God.

It is not enough, however, simply to know them. Witness is even more important than knowledge; or rather, it is applied knowledge. The commandments are not imposed upon us from without; they do not diminish our freedom. On the contrary: they are strong internal incentives leading us to act in a certain way. At the heart of them we find both grace and nature, which do not allow us to stay still. We must walk. We are motivated to do something in order fulfill our potential. To find fulfillment through action is, in reality, to become real. To a large extent, from the time of our youth, we are whatever we want to be. We are, so to speak, the work of our own hands.

5. At this point, I turn once more to you, young people, because I want to hear you give the same response that the young man in the Gospel gave: all these I have observed from my youth. The young man in the Gospel was good. He kept the commandments. He was walking along the way of God. Jesus, therefore, gazing at him, loved him. By recognizing that Jesus was good, he showed that he too was good. He had an experience of goodness, and therefore of God. And you, young people of Brazil and Latin America, have you already discovered what is good? Do you follow the Lord’s
commandments? Have you discovered that this is the one true road to happiness?

These years of your life are the years which will prepare you for your future. Your “tomorrow” depends much on how you are living the “today” of your youth. Stretching out in front of you, my dear young friends, is a life that all of us hope will be long; yet it is only one life, it is unique: do not let it pass it vain; do not squander it. Live it with enthusiasm and with joy, but most of all, with a sense of responsibility.

Many times, we who are pastors feel a sense of trepidation as we take stock of the situation in today’s world. We hear talk of the fears of today’s youth. These fears reveal an enormous lack of hope: a fear of death, at the very moment when life is blossoming and the young are searching to find how to fulfill their potential; fear of failure, through not having discovered the meaning of life; fear of remaining detached in the face of a disconcerting acceleration of events and communications. We see the high death rate among young people, the threat of violence, the deplorable proliferation of drugs which strike at the deepest roots of youth today. For these reasons, we hear talk of a “lost youth.”

But as I gaze at you young people here present—you who radiate so much joy and enthusiasm—I see you as Christ sees you: with a gaze of love and trust, in the certainty that you have found the true way. You are the youth of the Church. I send you out, therefore, on the great mission of evangelizing young men and women who have gone astray in this world like sheep without a shepherd. Be apostles of youth. Invite them to walk with you, to have the same experience of faith, hope, and love; to encounter Jesus so that they may feel truly loved, accepted, able to realize their full potential. May they too may discover the sure ways of the commandments, and, by following them, come to God.

You can be the builders of a new society if you seek to put into practice a conduct inspired by universal moral values, but also a personal commitment to a vitally important human and spiritual formation. Men and women who are ill-prepared for the real challenges presented by a correct interpretation of the Christian life in their own surroundings will easily fall prey to all the assaults of materialism and secularism, which are more and more active at all levels.
Be men and women who are free and responsible; make the family a center that radiates peace and joy; be promoters of life, from its beginning to its natural end; protect the elderly, since they deserve respect and admiration for the good they have done. The Pope also expects young people to seek to sanctify their work, carrying it out with technical skill and diligence, so as to contribute to the progress of all their brothers and sisters, and to shed the light of the Word upon all human activities (cf. Lumen Gentium, 36). But above all, the Pope wants them to set about building a more just and fraternal society, fulfilling their duties towards the State: respecting its laws; not allowing themselves to be swept along by hatred and violence; seeking to be an example of Christian conduct in their professional and social milieu, distinguishing themselves by the integrity of their social and professional relationships. They should remember that excessive ambition for wealth and power leads to corruption of oneself and others; there are no valid motives that would justify attempting to impose one’s own worldly aspirations—economic or political—through fraud and deceit.

There exists, in the final analysis, an immense panorama of action in which questions of a social, economic and political nature take on particular importance, as long as they draw their inspiration from the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church. This includes building a more just and fraternal society, reconciled and at peace, it includes the commitment to reduce violence, initiatives to promote the fullness of life, the democratic order and the common good and especially initiatives aimed at eliminating certain forms of discrimination existing in Latin American societies: avoiding exclusion, for the sake of mutual enrichment.

Above all, have great respect for the institution of the sacrament of Matrimony. There cannot be true domestic happiness unless, at the same time, there is fidelity between spouses. Marriage is an institution of natural law, which has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament; it is a great gift that God has given to mankind: respect it and honor it. At the same time, God calls you to respect one another when you fall in love and become engaged, since conjugal life, reserved by divine ordinance to married couples, will bring happiness and peace only to the extent that you are able to build your future hopes upon chastity, both within and outside
marriage. I repeat here to all of you that “eros tends to rise... towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing” (Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est, 5). To put it briefly, it requires a spirit of sacrifice and renunciation for the sake of a greater good, namely the love of God above all things. Seek to resist forcefully the snares of evil that are found in many contexts, driving you towards a dissolute and paradoxically empty life, causing you to lose the precious gift of your freedom and your true happiness. True love “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” (ibid., 7) and therefore will always grow in faithfulness, indissolubility and fruitfulness.

In all these things, count upon the help of Jesus Christ who will make them possible through his grace (cf. Mt 19:26). The life of faith and prayer will lead you along the paths of intimacy with God, helping you to understand the greatness of his plans for every person. “For the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12), some are called to a total and definitive self-giving, by consecrating themselves to God in the religious life—an “exceptional gift of grace,” as the Second Vatican Council expressed it (cf. Decree Perfectae Caritatis, 12). Consecrated persons, by giving themselves totally to God, prompted by the Holy Spirit, participate in the Church’s mission, bearing witness before all people to their hope in the heavenly Kingdom. I therefore bless and invoke divine protection upon all those religious who have dedicated themselves to Christ and to their brothers and sisters within the vineyard of the Lord. Consecrated persons truly deserve the gratitude of the ecclesial community: monks and nuns, contemplative men and women, religious men and women dedicated to apostolic works, members of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, hermits and consecrated virgins. “Their existence witnesses to their love for Christ as they walk the path proposed in the Gospel and with deep joy commit themselves to the same style of life which he chose for himself” (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction Starting Afresh from Christ, 5). I pray that in this moment of grace and profound communion in Christ, the Holy Spirit will awaken in the hearts of many young people an impassioned love, prompting
them to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, chaste, poor and obedient, totally devoted to the glory of the Father and to love for their brothers and sisters.

6. The Gospel assures us that the young man who went to meet Jesus was very rich. We may understand this wealth not only on the material level. Youth itself is a singular treasure. We have to discover it and to value it. Jesus appreciated it so much that he went on to invite the young man to participate in his saving mission. He had great potential and could have accomplished great things.

But the Gospel goes on to say that this young man, having heard the invitation, was saddened. He went away downcast and sad. This episode causes us to reflect further on the treasure of youth. It is not, in the first place, a question of material wealth, but of life itself, and the values inherent in youth. This wealth is inherited from two sources: life, transmitted from generation to generation, at the ultimate origin of which we find God, full of wisdom and love; and upbringing, which locates us within a culture, to such an extent that we might almost say we are more children of culture and therefore of faith, than of nature. From life springs freedom, which manifests itself, especially in this phase, as responsibility. There comes the great moment of decision, in a twofold choice: firstly, concerning one’s state of life, and secondly concerning one’s profession. It is about providing an answer to the question: what do I do with my life?

In other words, youth appears as a form of wealth because it leads to the discovery of life as a gift and a task. The young man in the Gospel understood that his youth was itself a treasure. He went to Jesus, the good Teacher, in order to seek some direction. At the moment of the great decision, however, he lacked the courage to wager everything on Jesus Christ. In consequence, he went away sad and downcast. This is what happens whenever our decisions waver and become cowardly and self-seeking. He understood that what he lacked was generosity, and this did not allow him to realize his full potential. He withdrew to his riches, turning them to selfishness.

Jesus regretted the sadness and the cowardice of the young man who had come to seek him out. The Apostles, like all of you here today, filled the vacuum left by that young man who went away sad and downcast. They, and we, are happy, because we know the one in whom we believe (cf.
2 Tim 1:12). We know and we bear witness with our lives that he alone has the words of eternal life (cf. Jn 6:68). Therefore, we can exclaim with Saint Paul: Rejoice always in the Lord! (cf. Phil 4:4).

7. My appeal to you today, young people present at this gathering, is this: do not waste your youth. Do not seek to escape from it. Live it intensely. Consecrate it to the high ideals of faith and human solidarity.

You, young people, are not just the future of the Church and of humanity, as if we could somehow run away from the present. On the contrary: you are that young man now; you are that young man in the Church and in humanity today. You are his young face. The Church needs you, as young people, to manifest to the world the face of Jesus Christ, visible in the Christian community. Without this young face, the Church would appear disfigured.

My dear young people, soon I shall inaugurate the Fifth Conference of the Bishops of Latin America. I ask you to follow its deliberations attentively; to participate in its discussions; to receive its fruits. As was the case with earlier Conferences, the present one will also leave a significant mark on the next ten years of evangelization in Latin America and the Caribbean. No one must stay on the sidelines or remain indifferent in the face of this ecclesial initiative, least of all you young people. You are full members of the Church, which represents the face of Jesus Christ for Latin America and the Caribbean.

I greet the French speakers who live on the Latin American continent, and I invite them to be witnesses of the Gospel, and to be actively engaged in the life of the Church. My prayer is addressed to you young people in a particular way: you are called to build your lives on Christ and on fundamental human values. Everyone should feel invited to work together in order to build a world of justice and peace.

My dear young friends, like the young man in the Gospel who asked Jesus: “What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?” you are all seeking ways to respond generously to God’s call. I pray that you may listen to his saving words and that you may become his witnesses for the peoples of today. May God pour out upon all of you his blessings of peace and joy.

My dear young people, Christ is calling you to be saints. He himself is
inviting you and wants to walk with you, in order to enliven with his Spirit the steps that Brazil is taking at the beginning of this third millennium of the Christian era. I ask the Senhora Aparecida to guide you with her maternal help and to accompany you throughout your lives.

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ!

Back to Contents

Homily on the Solemnity of Our Lady, Mother of God, 40th World Day of Peace (January 1, 2007)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As in a mosaic, today’s liturgy contemplates different events and messianic situations, but attention is especially focused on Mary, Mother of God. Eight days after Jesus’ birth, we commemorate the Mother, the Theotokos, the one who gave birth to the Child who is King of Heaven and earth for ever (cf. Entrance Antiphon; Sedulius).

The liturgy today meditates on the Word made man and repeats that he is born of the Virgin. It reflects on the circumcision of Jesus as a rite of admission to the community and contemplates God who, by means of Mary, gave his Only-Begotten Son to lead the “new people.” It recalls the name given to the Messiah and listens to it spoken with tender sweetness by his Mother. It invokes peace for the world, Christ’s peace, and does so through Mary, Mediatrix and Cooperator of Christ (cf. Lumen Gentium, nos. 60-61).

We are beginning a new solar year which is a further period of time offered to us by divine Providence in the context of the salvation inaugurated by Christ. But did not the eternal Word enter time precisely through Mary? In the Second Reading we have just listened to, the Apostle Paul recalls this by saying that Jesus was born “of woman” (Gal 4:4).

In today’s liturgy the figure of Mary, true Mother of Jesus, God-man, stands out. Thus, today’s Solemnity is not celebrating an abstract idea but a
mystery and an historic event: Jesus Christ, a divine Person, is born of the Virgin Mary who is his Mother in the truest sense.

Today, too, Mary’s virginity is highlighted, in addition to her motherhood. These are two prerogatives that are always proclaimed together, inseparably, because they complement and qualify each other. Mary is Mother, but a Virgin Mother; Mary is a virgin, but a Mother Virgin. If either of these aspects is ignored, the mystery of Mary as the Gospels present her to us, cannot be properly understood.

As Mother of Christ, Mary is also Mother of the Church, which my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI chose to proclaim on November 21, 1964 at the Second Vatican Council. Lastly, Mary is the Spiritual Mother of all humanity, because Jesus on the Cross shed his blood for all of us and from the Cross he entrusted us all to her maternal care.

Let us begin this new year, therefore, by looking at Mary whom we received from God’s hands as a precious “talent” to be made fruitful, a providential opportunity to contribute to bringing about the Kingdom of God.

In this atmosphere of prayer and gratitude to the Lord for the gift of a new year, I am pleased to address my respectful thoughts to the distinguished Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See who have desired to take part in today’s solemn Celebration.

I cordially greet Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, my Secretary of State. I greet Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino and the members of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and express to them my deep gratitude for the commitment with which they daily promote these values, so fundamental to social life.

For this World Day of Peace, I addressed the customary Message to the Governors and Leaders of Nations, as well as to all men and women of good will. Its theme this year is: “The human person, the heart of peace.”

I am deeply convinced that “respect for the person promotes peace and that, in building peace, the foundations are laid for an authentic integral humanism” (Message for World Peace Day, January 1, 2007, no. 1).
This commitment is especially incumbent on every Christian who is called “to be committed to tireless peace-making and strenuous defense of the dignity of the human person and his inalienable rights” (Message, no. 16). Precisely because he is created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1: 27), every human individual without distinction of race, culture or religion, as a person is clothed in God’s same dignity. For this reason he should be respected, nor can any reason ever justify an arbitrary use of him, as if he were an object.

In the face of the threats to peace that are unfortunately ever present, the situations of injustice and violence that persist in various areas of the earth and the continuing armed conflicts often overlooked by the majority of public opinion, as well as the danger of terrorism that clouds the serenity of peoples, it is becoming more necessary than ever to work for peace together. This, as I recalled in my Message, is “both gift and task” (no. 3): a gift to implore with prayer and a task to be carried out with courage, never tiring.

The Gospel narrative we have heard portrays the scene of the shepherds of Bethlehem, who after hearing the Angel's announcement go to the grotto to worship the Child (cf. Lk 2:16). Should we not look again at the dramatic situation marking the very Land in which Jesus was born? How can we not entreat God with insistent prayers for the day of peace to arrive as soon as possible in that region too, the day on which the current conflict that has lasted far too long will be resolved?

If a peace agreement is to endure, it must be based on respect for the dignity and rights of every person. I express to the representatives of the nations present here my hope that the International Community will muster its forces so that a world may be built in God’s Name in which the essential human rights are respected by all. For this to happen, people must recognize that these rights are not only based on human agreements but “on man’s very nature and his inalienable dignity as a person created by God” (Message, no. 13).

Indeed, were the constitutive elements of human dignity entrusted to changeable human opinions, even solemnly proclaimed human rights would end by being weakened and variously interpreted. “Consequently, it is
important for international agencies not to lose sight of the natural foundation of human rights. This would enable them to avoid the risk, unfortunately ever-present, of sliding towards a merely positivistic interpretation of those rights” (ibid.).

“The Lord bless you and keep you... lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Num 6:24, 26). This is the formula of the Blessing we heard in the First Reading, taken from the Book of Numbers. The Lord’s Name is repeated in it three times. This gives one an idea of the intensity and power of the Blessing, whose last word is “peace.”

The biblical term shalom, which we translate as “peace,” implies that accumulation of good things in which consists the “salvation” brought by Christ, the Messiah announced by the Prophets. We Christians therefore recognize him as the Prince of Peace. He became a man and was born in a grotto in Bethlehem to bring peace to people of good will, to all who welcome him with faith and love.

Thus, peace is truly the gift and commitment of Christmas: the gift that must be accepted with humble docility and constantly invoked with prayerful trust, the task that makes every person of good will a “channel of peace.”

Let us ask Mary, Mother of God, to help us to welcome her Son and, in him, true peace. Let us ask her to sharpen our perception so that we may recognize in the face of every human person, the Face of Christ, the heart of peace!

Back to Contents

Homily at the Mass in Suffrage for John Paul II (April 2, 2007)

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Two years ago, at a slightly later hour than now, beloved Pope John Paul II departed this world for the house of the Father. With this
celebration, let us first of all renew our thanksgiving to God for having
given him to us for well near 27 years as a father and reliable guide in the
faith, a zealous Pastor and courageous prophet of hope, a tireless witness
and passionate servant of God’s love.

As we offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice in suffrage for his chosen soul we
remember the unforgettable devotion with which he celebrated the Holy
Mysteries and adored the Sacrament of the Altar, the center of his life and
of his untiring mission.

I want to express my gratitude to all of you who have wished to take
part in this Holy Mass. I address a particular greeting to Cardinal Stanislaw
Dziwisz, Archbishop of Krakow, imagining the sentiments that must be
filling his heart at this moment. I greet the other Cardinals, Bishops, priests
and men and women Religious present; the pilgrims who have come here
expressly from Poland; all the young people whom Pope John Paul II loved
with a unique passion and the many members of the faithful from every
part of Italy and the world who have gathered here in St. Peter’s Square for
today’s appointment.

The second anniversary of the departure of this beloved Pontiff is	
taking place in a particularly favorable context for recollection and prayer.

Yesterday, in fact, with Palm Sunday we entered Holy Week and the
Liturgy makes us relive the last days of the Lord Jesus’ earthly life.

Today, it takes us to Bethany, where, precisely “six days before the
Passover,” as the Evangelist John notes, Lazarus, Martha and Mary asked
the Teacher to supper.

The Gospel account impresses an intense paschal atmosphere on our
meditation: the supper at Bethany is a prelude to Jesus’ death in the sign of
his anointing by Mary, a homage she pays to the Teacher which he accepts
as foretelling his burial (cf. Jn 12: 7).

However, it is also an announcement of the Resurrection through the
very presence of Lazarus restored to life, an eloquent witness of Christ’s
power over death.

Not only pregnant with Paschal significance, the narrative of the supper
at Bethany is imbued with an anguishing resonance filled with love and
devotion, a mist of joy and pain: festive joy at the visit of Jesus and his disciples, at the resurrection of Lazarus and at the Passover now at hand; deep sorrow because this Passover might be the last, as they were led to fear by the scheming of the Jews who desired the death of Jesus and by the threats to Lazarus whose death they were also planning.

One action in this Gospel passage is drawn to our attention, and which even now speaks to our hearts in a special way: Mary of Bethany, at a certain point, “took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair” (Jn 12: 3). This is one of those details of Jesus’ life which St. John cherished among his dearest memories and which is charged with inexhaustible feeling.

He speaks of love for Christ, a superabundant, wondrous love like that “costly” ointment poured over his feet. This event symptomatically shocked Judas Iscariot: the logic of love clashed with the logic of profit.

For us, gathered in prayer in memory of my Venerable Predecessor, the gesture of the anointing of Mary of Bethany is full of spiritual echoes and suggestions. It evokes John Paul II’s shining witness of love for Christ, unreserved and unstinting.

The “house,” that is, the entire Church, “was filled with the “fragrance” of his love (cf. Jn 12: 3).

Of course, we who were close to him benefited from it and are grateful to God, but even those who knew him from afar were able to enjoy it because Pope Wojtyla’s love for Christ was so strong, so intense, we could say, that it overflowed in every region of the world.

Was not the esteem, respect and affection expressed to him at his death by believers and non-believers alike an eloquent witness of this?

St. Augustine wrote, commenting on this passage of John’s Gospel: “‘The house was filled with the fragrance’. The world is filled with the fame of a good character: for a good character is like a sweet scent.... Through the good, the name of the Lord is honored” (In Io. Evang. tr. 50, 7). This is really true; the intense and fruitful pastoral ministry and, even more, the Calvary of the agony and serene death of our beloved Pope showed the people of our time that Jesus Christ was truly his “all.”
The fruitfulness of this witness, as we know, depended on the Cross. In Karol Wojtyla’s life, the word “cross” was not merely a word. From his childhood, he was familiar with suffering and death. As priest and Bishop and especially as Supreme Pontiff, he took most seriously the Risen Christ’s last call to Simon Peter on the shore of the Lake of Galilee: “Follow me... Follow me!” (Jn 21: 19, 22).

His whole life, particularly with the slow but implacable advance of the disease which gradually stripped him of everything, became an offering to Christ, a living proclamation of his passion in hope brimming with faith in the resurrection.

He lived his Pontificate in the sign of “prodigality,” generously spending himself without reserve. What motivated him other than mystical love for Christ, for the One who, on October 16, 1978, had him called with the ceremonial words: “Magister adest et vocat te - the Teacher is here and is calling you”?

On April 2, 2005, the Teacher called him again, this time without intermediaries, in order to take him home to the house of the Father. And once again he promptly responded with his brave heart in a whisper: “Let me go to the Lord” (cf. Stanislas Dziwisz, Una vita con Karol, p. 223).

He had been preparing for a long time for this last encounter with Jesus, as the various drafts of his Testament reveal. During the long periods he spent in his private chapel he spoke to Jesus, abandoning himself totally to his will, and entrusted himself to Mary, repeating the Totus Tuus. Like his Divine Teacher, he lived his agony in prayer. On the last day of his life, on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday, he asked that the Gospel of John be read to him.

With the help of those who were nursing him, he wanted to take part in all the daily prayers and in the Liturgy of the Hours, he wanted to do adoration and meditation. He died while he was praying. He truly fell asleep in the Lord.

“And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment” (Jn 12: 3). Let us return to this most evocative annotation by the Evangelist John. The Pope’s sweet scent of faith, hope and charity filled his house, filled St. Peter’s Square, filled the Church and spread throughout the world. What
happened after his death was for believers an effect of that “fragrance” which reached everyone near and far and attracted them to a man whom God had gradually conformed to his Christ.

For this reason, we can apply to him the words of the first Song of the Servant of the Lord which we heard in the First Reading: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations...” (Is 42: 1).

“Servant of God”: this is what he was and this is what we in the Church call him now, while the process of his Beatification continues.

This morning, the diocesan investigation into his life, virtues and fame of sanctity was concluded. “Servant of God,” a particularly appropriate title for him. The Lord called him to his service on the path of the priesthood and little by little unfolded before him ever broader horizons: from his own Diocese to the universal Church. This dimension of universality reached its apex at the moment of his death, an event the whole world lived with a participation unprecedented in history.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Responsorial Psalm has placed words full of trust on our lips. In the Communion of Saints, we seem to hear them spoken aloud by our beloved John Paul II, who, from the Father's House, we are sure of it, never ceases to accompany the Church on her way: “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord!” (Ps 27[26]: 13-14).

Yes, let your heart take courage, dear brothers and sisters, and burn with hope! With this invitation in our hearts let us continue the Eucharistic Celebration, already looking at the light of the Resurrection of Christ that will shine out in the Easter Vigil after the dramatic darkness of Good Friday.

May the Totus tuus of the beloved Pontiff encourage us to follow him on the path of the gift of ourselves to Christ through the intercession of Mary, and may she herself, the Virgin Mary, obtain it for us while we entrust to her motherly hands this father, brother and friend of ours, that he may rest in God and rejoice in peace. Amen.

Back to Contents
Homily at the Easter Vigil (April 7, 2007)

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

From ancient times the liturgy of Easter day has begun with the words: *Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum*—I arose, and am still with you; you have set your hand upon me. The liturgy sees these as the first words spoken by the Son to the Father after his resurrection, after his return from the night of death into the world of the living. The hand of the Father upheld him even on that night, and thus he could rise again.

These words are taken from Psalm 138, where originally they had a different meaning. That Psalm is a song of wonder at God’s omnipotence and omnipresence, a hymn of trust in the God who never allows us to fall from his hands. And his hands are good hands. The Psalmist imagines himself journeying to the farthest reaches of the cosmos—and what happens to him? “If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, ‘Let only darkness cover me’..., even the darkness is not dark to you...; for darkness is as light with you” (Ps 138[139]:8-12).

On Easter day the Church tells us that Jesus Christ made that journey to the ends of the universe for our sake. In the *Letter to the Ephesians* we read that he descended to the depths of the earth, and that the one who descended is also the one who has risen far above the heavens, that he might fill all things (cf. 4:9ff.). The vision of the Psalm thus became reality. In the impenetrable gloom of death Christ came like light—the night became as bright as day and the darkness became as light. And so the Church can rightly consider these words of thanksgiving and trust as words spoken by the Risen Lord to his Father: “Yes, I have journeyed to the uttermost depths of the earth, to the abyss of death, and brought them light; now I have risen and I am upheld for ever by your hands.” But these words of the Risen Christ to the Father have also become words which the Lord speaks to us: “I arose and now I am still with you,” he says to each of us. My hand upholds you. Wherever you may fall, you will always fall into my hands. I am present even at the door of death. Where no one can...
accompany you further, and where you can bring nothing, even there I am waiting for you, and for you I will change darkness into light.

These words of the Psalm, read as a dialogue between the Risen Christ and ourselves, also explain what takes place at Baptism. Baptism is more than a bath, a purification. It is more than becoming part of a community. It is a new birth. A new beginning in life. The passage of the Letter to the Romans which we have just read says, in words filled with mystery, that in Baptism we have been “grafted” onto Christ by likeness to his death. In Baptism we give ourselves over to Christ—he takes us unto himself, so that we no longer live for ourselves, but through him, with him and in him; so that we live with him and thus for others. In Baptism we surrender ourselves, we place our lives in his hands, and so we can say with Saint Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” If we offer ourselves in this way, if we accept, as it were, the death of our very selves, this means that the frontier between death and life is no longer absolute. On either side of death we are with Christ and so, from that moment forward, death is no longer a real boundary. Paul tells us this very clearly in his Letter to the Philippians: “For me to live is Christ. To be with him (by dying) is gain. Yet if I remain in this life, I can still labor fruitfully. And so I am hard pressed between these two things. To depart—by being executed—and to be with Christ; that is far better. But to remain in this life is more necessary on your account” (cf. 1:21ff.). On both sides of the frontier of death, Paul is with Christ—there is no longer a real difference. Yes, it is true: “Behind and before you besiege me, your hand ever laid upon me” (Ps 138 [139]: 5). To the Romans Paul wrote: “No one … lives to himself and no one dies to himself… Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14:7ff.).

Dear candidates for Baptism, this is what is new about Baptism: our life now belongs to Christ, and no longer to ourselves. As a result we are never alone, even in death, but are always with the One who lives for ever. In Baptism, in the company of Christ, we have already made that cosmic journey to the very abyss of death. At his side and, indeed, drawn up in his love, we are freed from fear. He enfolds us and carries us wherever we may go—he who is Life itself.
Let us return once more to the night of Holy Saturday. In the Creed we say about Christ’s journey that he “descended into hell.” What happened then? Since we have no knowledge of the world of death, we can only imagine his triumph over death with the help of images which remain very inadequate. Yet, inadequate as they are, they can help us to understand something of the mystery. The liturgy applies to Jesus’ descent into the night of death the words of Psalm 23[24]: “Lift up your heads, O gates; be lifted up, O ancient doors!” The gates of death are closed, no one can return from there. There is no key for those iron doors. But Christ has the key. His Cross opens wide the gates of death, the stern doors. They are barred no longer. His Cross, his radical love, is the key that opens them. The love of the One who, though God, became man in order to die—this love has the power to open those doors. This love is stronger than death. The Easter icons of the Oriental Church show how Christ enters the world of the dead. He is clothed with light, for God is light. “The night is bright as the day, the darkness is as light” (cf. Ps 138[139]12). Entering the world of the dead, Jesus bears the stigmata, the signs of his passion: his wounds, his suffering, have become power: they are love that conquers death. He meets Adam and all the men and women waiting in the night of death. As we look at them, we can hear an echo of the prayer of Jonah: “Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice” (Jn 2:2). In the incarnation, the Son of God became one with human beings—with Adam. But only at this moment, when he accomplishes the supreme act of love by descending into the night of death, does he bring the journey of the incarnation to its completion. By his death he now clasps the hand of Adam, of every man and woman who awaits him, and brings them to the light.

But we may ask: what is the meaning of all this imagery? What was truly new in what happened on account of Christ? The human soul was created immortal—what exactly did Christ bring that was new? The soul is indeed immortal, because man in a unique way remains in God’s memory and love, even after his fall. But his own powers are insufficient to lift him up to God. We lack the wings needed to carry us to those heights. And yet, nothing else can satisfy man eternally, except being with God. An eternity without this union with God would be a punishment. Man cannot attain those heights on his own, yet he yearns for them. “Out of the depths I cry to you…” Only the Risen Christ can bring us to complete union with God,
to the place where our own powers are unable to bring us. Truly Christ puts the lost sheep upon his shoulders and carries it home. Clinging to his Body we have life, and in communion with his Body we reach the very heart of God. Only thus is death conquered, we are set free and our life is hope.

This is the joy of the Easter Vigil: we are free. In the resurrection of Jesus, love has been shown to be stronger than death, stronger than evil. Love made Christ descend, and love is also the power by which he ascends. The power by which he brings us with him. In union with his love, borne aloft on the wings of love, as persons of love, let us descend with him into the world’s darkness, knowing that in this way we will also rise up with him. On this night, then, let us pray: Lord, show us that love is stronger than hatred, that love is stronger than death. Descend into the darkness and the abyss of our modern age, and take by the hand those who await you. Bring them to the light! In my own dark nights, be with me to bring me forth! Help me, help all of us, to descend with you into the darkness of all those people who are still waiting for you, who out of the depths cry unto you! Help us to bring them your light! Help us to say the “yes” of love, the love that makes us descend with you and, in so doing, also to rise with you. Amen!

Back to Contents

Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as a font and culmination of the life and mission of the Church, Sacramentum Caritatis (February 22, 2007)

INTRODUCTION

1. The sacrament of charity, [1] the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God’s infinite love for every man and woman. This wondrous sacrament makes manifest that “greater” love which led him to “lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). Jesus did indeed love them “to the end” (Jn 13:1). In those words the Evangelist introduces Christ’s act of immense humility: before dying for us on the
Cross, he tied a towel around himself and washed the feet of his disciples. In the same way, Jesus continues, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, to love us “to the end,” even to offering us his body and his blood. What amazement must the Apostles have felt in witnessing what the Lord did and said during that Supper! What wonder must the Eucharistic mystery also awaken in our own hearts!

_The food of truth_

2. In the sacrament of the altar, the Lord meets us, men and women created in God’s image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:27), and becomes our companion along the way. In this sacrament, the Lord truly becomes food for us, to satisfy our hunger for truth and freedom. Since only the truth can make us free (cf. *Jn* 8:32), Christ becomes for us the food of truth. With deep human insight, Saint Augustine clearly showed how we are moved spontaneously, and not by constraint, whenever we encounter something attractive and desirable. Asking himself what it is that can move us most deeply, the saintly Bishop went on to say: “What does our soul desire more passionately than truth?”[2] Each of us has an innate and irrepressible desire for ultimate and definitive truth. The Lord Jesus, “the way, and the truth, and the life” (*Jn* 14:6), speaks to our thirsting, pilgrim hearts, our hearts yearning for the source of life, our hearts longing for truth. Jesus Christ is the Truth in person, drawing the world to himself. “Jesus is the lodestar of human freedom: without him, freedom loses its focus, for without the knowledge of truth, freedom becomes debased, alienated and reduced to empty caprice. With him, freedom finds itself.”[3] In the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus shows us in particular the _truth about the love_ which is the very essence of God. It is this evangelical truth which challenges each of us and our whole being. For this reason, the Church, which finds in the Eucharist the very centre of her life, is constantly concerned to proclaim to all, _opportune importune_ (cf. 2 *Tim* 4:2), that God is love.[4] Precisely because Christ has become for us the food of truth, the Church turns to every man and woman, inviting them freely to accept God’s gift.

_The development of the Eucharistic rite_

3. If we consider the bimillenary history of God’s Church, guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we can gratefully admire the orderly development of the ritual forms in which we commemorate the event of our
salvation. From the varied forms of the early centuries, still resplendent in the rites of the Ancient Churches of the East, up to the spread of the Roman rite; from the clear indications of the Council of Trent and the Missal of Saint Pius V to the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council: in every age of the Church’s history the Eucharistic celebration, as the source and summit of her life and mission, shines forth in the liturgical rite in all its richness and variety. The Eleventh Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held from 2-23 October 2005 in the Vatican, gratefully acknowledged the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this rich history. In a particular way, the Synod Fathers acknowledged and reaffirmed the beneficial influence on the Church’s life of the liturgical renewal which began with the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council[5]. The Synod of Bishops was able to evaluate the reception of the renewal in the years following the Council. There were many expressions of appreciation. The difficulties and even the occasional abuses which were noted, it was affirmed, cannot overshadow the benefits and the validity of the liturgical renewal, whose riches are yet to be fully explored. Concretely, the changes which the Council called for need to be understood within the overall unity of the historical development of the rite itself, without the introduction of artificial discontinuities.[6]

**The Synod of Bishops and the Year of the Eucharist**

4. We should also emphasize the relationship between the recent Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist and the events which have taken place in the Church’s life in recent years. First of all, we should recall the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, with which my beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, led the Church into the third Christian millennium. The Jubilee Year clearly had a significant Eucharistic dimension. Nor can we forget that the Synod of Bishops was preceded, and in some sense prepared for, by the Year of the Eucharist which John Paul II had, with great foresight, wanted the whole Church to celebrate. That year, which began with the International Eucharistic Congress in Guadalajara in October 2004, ended on 23 October 2005, at the conclusion of the XI Synodal Assembly, with the canonization of five saints particularly distinguished for their Eucharistic piety: Bishop Józef Bilczewski, Fathers Gaetano Catanoso, Zygmunt Gorazdowski and Alberto Hurtado Cruchaga, and the
Capuchin Fra Felice da Nicosia. Thanks to the teachings proposed by John Paul II in the Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*[^7] and to the helpful suggestions of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments,[^8] many initiatives were undertaken by Dioceses and various ecclesial groups in order to reawaken and increase Eucharistic faith, to improve the quality of Eucharistic celebration, to promote Eucharistic adoration and to encourage a practical solidarity which, starting from the Eucharist, would reach out to those in need. Finally, mention should be made of the significance of my venerable Predecessor’s last Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*[^9], in which he left us a sure magisterial statement of the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist and a final testimony of the central place that this divine sacrament had in his own life.

**The purpose of this Exhortation**

5. This Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation seeks to take up the richness and variety of the reflections and proposals which emerged from the recent Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops — from the Lineamenta to the Propositiones, along the way of the Instrumentum Laboris, the Relationes ante and post disceptationem, the interventions of the Synod Fathers, the auditores and the fraternal delegates — and to offer some basic directions aimed at a renewed commitment to Eucharistic enthusiasm and fervor in the Church. Conscious of the immense patrimony of doctrine and discipline accumulated over the centuries with regard to this sacrament,[^10] I wish here to endorse the wishes expressed by the Synod Fathers[^11] by encouraging the Christian people to deepen their understanding of the relationship between the Eucharistic mystery, the liturgical action, and the new spiritual worship which derives from the Eucharist as the sacrament of charity. Consequently, I wish to set the present Exhortation alongside my first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, in which I frequently mentioned the sacrament of the Eucharist and stressed its relationship to Christian love, both of God and of neighbor: “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”[^12].

**PART ONE**

**THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY**
TO BE BELIEVED

“This is the work of God: that you believe in him whom he has sent” (Jn 6:29)

The Church’s Eucharistic faith

6. “The mystery of faith!” With these words, spoken immediately after the words of consecration, the priest proclaims the mystery being celebrated and expresses his wonder before the substantial change of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, a reality which surpasses all human understanding. The Eucharist is a “mystery of faith” par excellence: “the sum and summary of our faith.”[13] The Church’s faith is essentially a Eucharistic faith, and it is especially nourished at the table of the Eucharist. Faith and the sacraments are two complementary aspects of ecclesial life. Awakened by the preaching of God’s word, faith is nourished and grows in the grace-filled encounter with the Risen Lord which takes place in the sacraments: “faith is expressed in the rite, while the rite reinforces and strengthens faith.”[14] For this reason, the Sacrament of the Altar is always at the heart of the Church’s life: “thanks to the Eucharist, the Church is reborn ever anew!”[15] The more lively the Eucharistic faith of the People of God, the deeper is its sharing in ecclesial life in steadfast commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples. The Church’s very history bears witness to this. Every great reform has in some way been linked to the rediscovery of belief in the Lord’s Eucharistic presence among his people.

The Blessed Trinity and the Eucharist

The bread come down from heaven

7. The first element of Eucharistic faith is the mystery of God himself, Trinitarian love. In Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus, we find an illuminating expression in this regard: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:16-17). These words show the deepest source of God’s gift. In the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a “thing,” but himself; he offers his own body and pours out his own blood. He thus gives us the totality of his life and reveals the ultimate origin of this
love. He is the eternal Son, given to us by the Father. In the Gospel we hear how Jesus, after feeding the crowds by multiplying the loaves and fishes, says to those who had followed him to the synagogue of Capernaum: “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven; for the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world” (Jn 6:32-33), and even identifies himself, his own flesh and blood, with that bread: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51). Jesus thus shows that he is the bread of life which the eternal Father gives to mankind.

A free gift of the Blessed Trinity

8. The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history (cf. Eph 1:10; 3:8-11). There the Deus Trinities, who is essentially love (cf. 1 Jn 4:7-8), becomes fully a part of our human condition. In the bread and wine under whose appearances Christ gives himself to us in the paschal meal (cf. Lk 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26), God’s whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us. God is a perfect communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At creation itself, man was called to have some share in God’s breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). But it is in Christ, dead and risen, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, given without measure (cf. Jn 3:34), that we have become sharers of God’s inmost life.[16] Jesus Christ, who “through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” (Heb 9:14), makes us, in the gift of the Eucharist, sharers in God’s own life. This is an absolutely free gift, the superabundant fulfillment of God’s promises. The Church receives, celebrates and adores this gift in faithful obedience. The “mystery of faith” is thus a mystery of Trinitarian love, a mystery in which we are called by grace to participate. We too should therefore exclaim with Saint Augustine: “If you see love, you see the Trinity.”[17]

The Eucharist: Jesus the true Sacrificial lamb

The new and eternal covenant in the blood of the Lamb

9. The mission for which Jesus came among us was accomplished in the Paschal Mystery. On the Cross from which he draws all people to himself (cf. Jn 12:32), just before “giving up the Spirit,” he utters the words: “it is
finished” (Jn 19:30). In the mystery of Christ’s obedience unto death, even death on a Cross (cf. Phil 2:8), the new and eternal covenant was brought about. In his crucified flesh, God’s freedom and our human freedom met definitively in an inviolable, eternally valid pact. Human sin was also redeemed once for all by God’s Son (cf. Heb 7:27; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). As I have said elsewhere, “Christ’s 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.” [18] In the Paschal Mystery, our deliverance from evil and death has taken place. In instituting the Eucharist, Jesus had spoken of the “new and eternal covenant” in the shedding of his blood (cf. Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20). This, the ultimate purpose of his mission, was clear from the very beginning of his public life. Indeed, when, on the banks of the Jordan, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him, he cried out: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). It is significant that these same words are repeated at every celebration of Holy Mass, when the priest invites us to approach the altar: “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper.” Jesus is the true paschal lamb who freely gave himself in sacrifice for us, and thus brought about the new and eternal covenant. The Eucharist contains this radical newness, which is offered to us again at every celebration.[19]

The institution of the Eucharist

10. This leads us to reflect on the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. It took place within a ritual meal commemorating the foundational event of the people of Israel: their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. This ritual meal, which called for the sacrifice of lambs (cf. Ex 12:1-28, 43-51), was a remembrance of the past, but at the same time a prophetic remembrance, the proclamation of a deliverance yet to come. The people had come to realize that their earlier liberation was not definitive, for their history continued to be marked by slavery and sin. The remembrance of their ancient liberation thus expanded to the invocation and expectation of a yet more profound, radical, universal and definitive salvation. This is the context in which Jesus introduces the newness of his gift. In the prayer of praise, the Berakah, he does not simply thank the Father for the great events of past history, but also for his own “exaltation.”
In instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus anticipates and makes present the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the resurrection. At the same time, he reveals that he himself is the true sacrificial lamb, destined in the Father’s plan from the foundation of the world, as we read in The First Letter of Peter (cf. 1:18-20). By placing his gift in this context, Jesus shows the salvific meaning of his death and resurrection, a mystery which renews history and the whole cosmos. The institution of the Eucharist demonstrates how Jesus’ death, for all its violence and absurdity, became in him a supreme act of love and mankind’s definitive deliverance from evil.

Figura transit in veritatem

11. Jesus thus brings his own radical novum to the ancient Hebrew sacrificial meal. For us Christians, that meal no longer need be repeated. As the Church Fathers rightly say, figura transit in veritatem: the foreshadowing has given way to the truth itself. The ancient rite has been brought to fulfillment and definitively surpassed by the loving gift of the incarnate Son of God. The food of truth, Christ sacrificed for our sake, dat figuris terminum.[20] By his command to “do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:25), he asks us to respond to his gift and to make it sacramentally present. In these words the Lord expresses, as it were, his expectation that the Church, born of his sacrifice, will receive this gift, developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the liturgical form of the sacrament. The remembrance of his perfect gift consists not in the mere repetition of the Last Supper, but in the Eucharist itself, that is, in the radical newness of Christian worship. In this way, Jesus left us the task of entering into his “hour.” “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.”[21] Jesus “draws us into himself.”[22] The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of “nuclear fission,” to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

The Holy Spirit and the Eucharist

Jesus and the Holy Spirit
12. With his word and with the elements of bread and wine, the Lord himself has given us the essentials of this new worship. The Church, his Bride, is called to celebrate the Eucharistic banquet daily in his memory. She thus makes the redeeming sacrifice of her Bridegroom a part of human history and makes it sacramentally present in every culture. This great mystery is celebrated in the liturgical forms which the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, develops in time and space.\[^{23}\] We need a renewed awareness of the decisive role played by the Holy Spirit in the evolution of the liturgical form and the deepening understanding of the sacred mysteries. The Paraclete, Christ’s first gift to those who believe, \[^{24}\] already at work in Creation (cf. Gen 1:2), is fully present throughout the life of the incarnate Word: Jesus Christ is conceived by the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 1:18; Lk 1:35); at the beginning of his public mission, on the banks of the Jordan, he sees the Spirit descend upon him in the form of a dove (cf. Mt 3:16 and parallels); he acts, speaks and rejoices in the Spirit (cf. Lk 10:21), and he can offer himself in the Spirit (cf. Heb 9:14). In the so-called “farewell discourse” reported by John, Jesus clearly relates the gift of his life in the paschal mystery to the gift of the Spirit to his own (cf. Jn 16:7). Once risen, bearing in his flesh the signs of the passion, he can pour out the Spirit upon them (cf. Jn 20:22), making them sharers in his own mission (cf. Jn 20:21). The Spirit would then teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all that Christ had said (cf. Jn 14:26), since it falls to him, as the Spirit of truth (cf. Jn 15:26), to guide the disciples into all truth (cf. Jn 16:13). In the account in Acts, the Spirit descends on the Apostles gathered in prayer with Mary on the day of Pentecost (cf. 2:1-4) and stirs them to undertake the mission of proclaiming the Good News to all peoples. Thus it is through the working of the Spirit that Christ himself continues to be present and active in his Church, starting with her vital center which is the Eucharist.

*The Holy Spirit and the Eucharistic celebration*

13. Against this backdrop we can understand the decisive role played by the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic celebration, particularly with regard to transubstantiation. An awareness of this is clearly evident in the Fathers of the Church. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, in his Catecheses, states that we “call upon God in his mercy to send his Holy Spirit upon the offerings before us,
to transform the bread into the body of Christ and the wine into the blood of Christ. Whatever the Holy Spirit touches is sanctified and completely transformed"[25]. Saint John Chrysostom too notes that the priest invokes the Holy Spirit when he celebrates the sacrifice:[26] like Elijah, the minister calls down the Holy Spirit so that “as grace comes down upon the victim, the souls of all are thereby inflamed”[27]. The spiritual life of the faithful can benefit greatly from a better appreciation of the richness of the anaphora: along with the words spoken by Christ at the Last Supper, it contains the epiclesis, the petition to the Father to send down the gift of the Spirit so that the bread and the wine will become the body and blood of Jesus Christ and that “the community as a whole will become ever more the body of Christ”[28]. The Spirit invoked by the celebrant upon the gifts of bread and wine placed on the altar is the same Spirit who gathers the faithful “into one body” and makes of them a spiritual offering pleasing to the Father[29].

**The Eucharist and the Church**

*The Eucharist, causal principle of the Church*

14. Through the sacrament of the Eucharist Jesus draws the faithful into his “hour;” he shows us the bond that he willed to establish between himself and us, between his own person and the Church. Indeed, in the sacrifice of the Cross, Christ gave birth to the Church as his Bride and his body. The Fathers of the Church often meditated on the relationship between Eve’s coming forth from the side of Adam as he slept (cf. Gen 2:21-23) and the coming forth of the new Eve, the Church, from the open side of Christ sleeping in death: from Christ’s pierced side, John recounts, there came forth blood and water (cf. Jn 19:34), the symbol of the sacraments[30]. A contemplative gaze “upon him whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37) leads us to reflect on the causal connection between Christ’s sacrifice, the Eucharist and the Church. The Church “draws her life from the Eucharist”[31]. Since the Eucharist makes present Christ’s redeeming sacrifice, we must start by acknowledging that “there is a causal influence of the Eucharist at the Church’s very origins”[32]. The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body. Hence, in the striking interplay between the Eucharist which builds up the Church, and the Church herself which “makes” the Eucharist [33], the primary causality is expressed in the first formula: the Church is able to celebrate and adore the
mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist precisely because Christ first gave himself to her in the sacrifice of the Cross. The Church’s ability to “make” the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ’s self-gift to her. Here we can see more clearly the meaning of Saint John’s words: “he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). We too, at every celebration of the Eucharist, confess the primacy of Christ’s gift. The causal influence of the Eucharist at the Church’s origins definitively discloses both the chronological and ontological priority of the fact that it was Christ who loved us “first.” For all eternity he remains the one who loves us first.

*The Eucharist and ecclesial communion*

15. The Eucharist is thus constitutive of the Church’s being and activity. This is why Christian antiquity used the same words, *Corpus Christi*, to designate Christ’s body born of the Virgin Mary, his Eucharistic body and his ecclesial body. This clear datum of the tradition helps us to appreciate the inseparability of Christ and the Church. The Lord Jesus, by offering himself in sacrifice for us, in his gift effectively pointed to the mystery of the Church. It is significant that the Second Eucharistic Prayer, invoking the Paraclete, formulates its prayer for the unity of the Church as follows: “may all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.” These words help us to see clearly how the *res* of the sacrament of the Eucharist is the unity of the faithful within ecclesial communion. The Eucharist is thus found at the root of the Church as a mystery of communion.

The relationship between Eucharist and *communio* had already been pointed out by the Servant of God John Paul II in his Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. He spoke of the memorial of Christ as “the supreme sacramental manifestation of communion in the Church.” The unity of ecclesial communion is concretely manifested in the Christian communities and is renewed at the celebration of the Eucharist, which unites them and differentiates them in the particular Churches, “*in quibus et ex quibus una et unica Ecclesia catholica existit*.” The fact that the one Eucharist is celebrated in each Diocese around its own Bishop helps us to see how those particular Churches subsist *in* and *ex Ecclesia*. Indeed, “the oneness and indivisibility of the Eucharistic body of the Lord implies the oneness of his mystical body, which is the one and indivisible Church. From the
Eucharistic centre arises the necessary openness of every celebrating community, of every particular Church. By allowing itself to be drawn into the open arms of the Lord, it achieves insertion into his one and undivided body. Consequently, in the celebration of the Eucharist, the individual members of the faithful find themselves in their Church, that is, in the Church of Christ. From this Eucharistic perspective, adequately understood, ecclesial communion is seen to be catholic by its very nature. An emphasis on this Eucharistic basis of ecclesial communion can also contribute greatly to the ecumenical dialogue with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which are not in full communion with the See of Peter. The Eucharist objectively creates a powerful bond of unity between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, which have preserved the authentic and integral nature of the Eucharistic mystery. At the same time, emphasis on the ecclesial character of the Eucharist can become an important element of the dialogue with the Communities of the Reformed tradition.

**The Eucharist and the Sacraments**

*The sacramentality of the Church*

16. The Second Vatican Council recalled that “all the sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are directed towards it. For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, namely Christ himself our Pasch and our living bread, who gives life to humanity through his flesh — that flesh which is given life and gives life by the Holy Spirit. Thus men and women are invited and led to offer themselves, their works and all creation in union with Christ.” This close relationship of the Eucharist with the other sacraments and the Christian life can be most fully understood when we contemplate the mystery of the Church herself as a sacrament. The Council in this regard stated that “the Church, in Christ, is a sacrament — a sign and instrument — of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race.” To quote Saint Cyprian, as “a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,” she is the sacrament of Trinitarian communion.

The fact that the Church is the “universal sacrament of salvation” shows how the sacramental economy ultimately determines the way that
Christ, the one Saviour, through the Spirit, reaches our lives in all their particularity. The Church receives and at the same time expresses what she herself is in the seven sacraments, thanks to which God’s grace concretely influences the lives of the faithful, so that their whole existence, redeemed by Christ, can become an act of worship pleasing to God. From this perspective, I would like here to draw attention to some elements brought up by the Synod Fathers which may help us to grasp the relationship of each of the sacraments to the Eucharistic mystery.

I. The Eucharist and Christian initiation

The Eucharist, the fullness of Christian initiation

17. If the Eucharist is truly the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission, it follows that the process of Christian initiation must constantly be directed to the reception of this sacrament. As the Synod Fathers said, we need to ask ourselves whether in our Christian communities the close link between Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist is sufficiently recognized.[46] It must never be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. Accordingly, our pastoral practice should reflect a more unitary understanding of the process of Christian initiation. The sacrament of Baptism, by which we were conformed to Christ,[47] incorporated in the Church and made children of God, is the portal to all the sacraments. It makes us part of the one Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:13), a priestly people. Still, it is our participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice which perfects within us the gifts given to us at Baptism. The gifts of the Spirit are given for the building up of Christ’s Body (1 Cor 12) and for ever greater witness to the Gospel in the world.[48] The Holy Eucharist, then, brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the centre and goal of all sacramental life.[49]

The order of the sacraments of initiation

18. In this regard, attention needs to be paid to the order of the sacraments of initiation. Different traditions exist within the Church. There is a clear variation between, on the one hand, the ecclesial customs of the East[50] and the practice of the West regarding the initiation of adults,[51] and, on the other hand, the procedure adopted for children.[52] Yet these variations are not properly of the dogmatic order, but are pastoral
in character. Concretely, it needs to be seen which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the centre, as the goal of the whole process of initiation. In close collaboration with the competent offices of the Roman Curia, Bishops’ Conferences should examine the effectiveness of current approaches to Christian initiation, so that the faithful can be helped both to mature through the formation received in our communities and to give their lives an authentically Eucharistic direction, so that they can offer a reason for the hope within them in a way suited to our times (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

Initiation, the ecclesial community and the family

19. It should be kept in mind that the whole of Christian initiation is a process of conversion undertaken with God’s help and with constant reference to the ecclesial community, both when an adult is seeking entry into the Church, as happens in places of first evangelization and in many secularized regions, and when parents request the sacraments for their children. In this regard, I would like to call particular attention to the relationship between Christian initiation and the family. In pastoral work it is always important to make Christian families part of the process of initiation. Receiving Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion are key moments not only for the individual receiving them but also for the entire family, which should be supported in its educational role by the various elements of the ecclesial community. Here I would emphasize the importance of First Holy Communion. For many of the faithful, this day continues to be memorable as the moment when, even if in a rudimentary way, they first came to understand the importance of a personal encounter with Jesus. Parish pastoral programs should make the most of this highly significant moment.

II. The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Their intrinsic relationship

20. The Synod Fathers rightly stated that a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Given the connection between these sacraments, an authentic catechesis on the meaning of the Eucharist must include the call to pursue the path of penance (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-29). We know that the faithful are surrounded by
a culture that tends to eliminate the sense of sin[55] and to promote a superficial approach that overlooks the need to be in a state of grace in order to approach sacramental communion worthily.[56] The loss of a consciousness of sin always entails a certain superficiality in the understanding of God’s love. Bringing out the elements within the rite of Mass that express consciousness of personal sin and, at the same time, of God’s mercy, can prove most helpful to the faithful.[57] Furthermore, the relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation reminds us that sin is never a purely individual affair; it always damages the ecclesial communion that we have entered through Baptism. For this reason, Reconciliation, as the Fathers of the Church would say, is laboriosus quidam baptismus;[58] they thus emphasized that the outcome of the process of conversion is also the restoration of full ecclesial communion, expressed in a return to the Eucharist.[59]

Some pastoral concerns

21. The Synod recalled that Bishops have the pastoral duty of promoting within their Dioceses a reinvigorated catechesis on the conversion born of the Eucharist, and of encouraging frequent confession among the faithful. All priests should dedicate themselves with generosity, commitment and competency to administering the sacrament of Reconciliation.[60] In this regard, it is important that the confessionals in our churches should be clearly visible expressions of the importance of this sacrament. I ask pastors to be vigilant with regard to the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, and to limit the practice of general absolution exclusively to the cases permitted,[61] since individual absolution is the only form intended for ordinary use.[62] Given the need to rediscover sacramental forgiveness, there ought to be a Penitentiary in every Diocese.[63] Finally, a balanced and sound practice of gaining indulgences, whether for oneself or for the dead, can be helpful for a renewed appreciation of the relationship between the Eucharist and Reconciliation. By this means the faithful obtain “remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.”[64] The use of indulgences helps us to understand that by our efforts alone we would be incapable of making reparation for the wrong we have done, and that the sins of each individual harm the whole community. Furthermore, the
practice of indulgences, which involves not only the doctrine of Christ’s infinite merits, but also that of the communion of the saints, reminds us “how closely we are united to each other in Christ... and how the supernatural life of each can help others.”[65] Since the conditions for gaining an indulgence include going to confession and receiving sacramental communion, this practice can effectively sustain the faithful on their journey of conversion and in rediscovering the centrality of the Eucharist in the Christian life.

III. The Eucharist and the Anointing of the sick

22. Jesus did not only send his disciples forth to heal the sick (cf. Mt 10:8; Lk 9:2, 10:9); he also instituted a specific sacrament for them: the Anointing of the Sick.[66] The Letter of James attests to the presence of this sacramental sign in the early Christian community (cf. 5:14-16). If the Eucharist shows how Christ’s sufferings and death have been transformed into love, the Anointing of the Sick, for its part, unites the sick with Christ’s self-offering for the salvation of all, so that they too, within the mystery of the communion of saints, can participate in the redemption of the world. The relationship between these two sacraments becomes clear in situations of serious illness: “In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum.”[67] On their journey to the Father, communion in the Body and Blood of Christ appears as the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection: “Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn 6:54). Since viaticum gives the sick a glimpse of the fullness of the Paschal Mystery, its administration should be readily provided for.[68] Attentive pastoral care shown to those who are ill brings great spiritual benefit to the entire community, since whatever we do to one of the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to Jesus himself (cf. Mt 25:40).

IV. The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders

In persona Christi capitis

23. The intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of Holy Orders clearly emerges from Jesus’ own words in the Upper Room: “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19). On the night before he died, Jesus
instituted the Eucharist and at the same time established the *priesthood of the New Covenant*. He is priest, victim and altar: the mediator between God the Father and his people (cf. *Heb* 5:5-10), the victim of atonement (cf. *1 Jn* 2:2, 4:10) who offers himself on the altar of the Cross. No one can say “this is my body” and “this is the cup of my blood” except in the name and in the person of Christ, the one high priest of the new and eternal Covenant (cf. *Heb* 8-9). Earlier meetings of the Synod of Bishops had considered the question of the ordained priesthood, both with regard to the nature of the ministry and the formation of candidates. Here, in the light of the discussion that took place during the last Synod, I consider it important to recall several important points about the relationship between the sacrament of the Eucharist and Holy Orders. First of all, we need to stress once again that the connection between Holy Orders and the Eucharist is seen most clearly at Mass, when the Bishop or priest presides in the person of Christ the Head.

The Church teaches that priestly ordination is the indispensable condition for the valid celebration of the Eucharist. Indeed, “in the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, High Priest of the redemptive sacrifice.” Certainly the ordained minister also acts “in the name of the whole Church, when presenting to God the prayer of the Church, and above all when offering the Eucharistic sacrifice.” As a result, priests should be conscious of the fact that in their ministry they must never put themselves or their personal opinions in first place, but Jesus Christ. Any attempt to make themselves the center of the liturgical action contradicts their very identity as priests. The priest is above all a servant of others, and he must continually work at being a sign pointing to Christ, a docile instrument in the Lord’s hands. This is seen particularly in his humility in leading the liturgical assembly, in obedience to the rite, uniting himself to it in mind and heart, and avoiding anything that might give the impression of an inordinate emphasis on his own personality. I encourage the clergy always to see their Eucharistic ministry as a humble service offered to Christ and his Church. The priesthood, as Saint Augustine said, is *amoris officium*, it is the office of the good shepherd, who offers his life for his sheep (cf. *Jn* 10:14-15).
The Eucharist and priestly celibacy

24. The Synod Fathers wished to emphasize that the ministerial priesthood, through ordination, calls for complete configuration to Christ. While respecting the different practice and tradition of the Eastern Churches, there is a need to reaffirm the profound meaning of priestly celibacy, which is rightly considered a priceless treasure, and is also confirmed by the Eastern practice of choosing Bishops only from the ranks of the celibate. These Churches also greatly esteem the decision of many priests to embrace celibacy. This choice on the part of the priest expresses in a special way the dedication which conforms him to Christ and his exclusive offering of himself for the Kingdom of God. The fact that Christ himself, the eternal priest, lived his mission even to the sacrifice of the Cross in the state of virginity constitutes the sure point of reference for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church. It is not sufficient to understand priestly celibacy in purely functional terms. Celibacy is really a special way of conforming oneself to Christ’s own way of life. This choice has first and foremost a nuptial meaning; it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for his Bride. In continuity with the great ecclesial tradition, with the Second Vatican Council and with my predecessors in the papacy, I reaffirm the beauty and the importance of a priestly life lived in celibacy as a sign expressing total and exclusive devotion to Christ, to the Church and to the Kingdom of God, and I therefore confirm that it remains obligatory in the Latin tradition. Priestly celibacy lived with maturity, joy and dedication is an immense blessing for the Church and for society itself.

The clergy shortage and the pastoral care of vocations

25. In the light of the connection between the sacrament of Holy Orders and the Eucharist, the Synod considered the difficult situation that has arisen in various Dioceses which face a shortage of priests. This happens not only in some areas of first evangelization, but also in many countries of long-standing Christian tradition. Certainly a more equitable distribution of clergy would help to solve the problem. Efforts need to be made to encourage a greater awareness of this situation at every level. Bishops should involve Institutes of Consecrated Life and the new ecclesial groups in their pastoral needs, while respecting their particular charisms,
and they should invite the clergy to become more open to serving the Church wherever there is need, even if this calls for sacrifice. The Synod also discussed pastoral initiatives aimed at promoting, especially among the young, an attitude of interior openness to a priestly calling. The situation cannot be resolved by purely practical decisions. On no account should Bishops react to real and understandable concerns about the shortage of priests by failing to carry out adequate vocational discernment, or by admitting to seminary formation and ordination candidates who lack the necessary qualities for priestly ministry. An insufficiently formed clergy, admitted to ordination without the necessary discernment, will not easily be able to offer a witness capable of evoking in others the desire to respond generously to Christ’s call. The pastoral care of vocations needs to involve the entire Christian community in every area of its life. Obviously, this pastoral work on all levels also includes exploring the matter with families, which are often indifferent or even opposed to the idea of a priestly vocation. Families should generously embrace the gift of life and bring up their children to be open to doing God’s will. In a word, they must have the courage to set before young people the radical decision to follow Christ, showing them how deeply rewarding it is.

**Gratitude and hope**

26. Finally, we need to have ever greater faith and hope in God’s providence. Even if there is a shortage of priests in some areas, we must never lose confidence that Christ continues to inspire men to leave everything behind and to dedicate themselves totally to celebrating the sacred mysteries, preaching the Gospel and ministering to the flock. In this regard, I wish to express the gratitude of the whole Church for all those Bishops and priests who carry out their respective missions with fidelity, devotion and zeal. Naturally, the Church’s gratitude also goes to deacons, who receive the laying on of hands “not for priesthood but for service.” As the Synod Assembly recommended, I offer a special word of thanks to those *Fidei Donum* priests who work faithfully and generously at building up the community by proclaiming the word of God and breaking the Bread of Life, devoting all their energy to serving the mission of the Church. Let us thank God for all those priests who have suffered even to the sacrifice of their lives in order to serve Christ. The eloquence of their
example shows what it means to be a priest to the end. Their is a moving witness that can inspire many young people to follow Christ and to expend their lives for others, and thus to discover true life.

V. The Eucharist and Matrimony

The Eucharist, a nuptial sacrament

27. The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage. A deeper understanding of this relationship is needed at the present time.[83] Pope John Paul II frequently spoke of the nuptial character of the Eucharist and its special relationship with the sacrament of Matrimony: “The Eucharist is the sacrament of our redemption. It is the sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride.”[84] Moreover, “the entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist.”[85] The Eucharist inexhaustibly strengthens the indissoluble unity and love of every Christian marriage. By the power of the sacrament, the marriage bond is intrinsically linked to the Eucharistic unity of Christ the Bridegroom and his Bride, the Church (cf. Eph 5:31-32). The mutual consent that husband and wife exchange in Christ, which establishes them as a community of life and love, also has a Eucharistic dimension. Indeed, in the theology of Saint Paul, conjugal love is a sacramental sign of Christ’s love for his Church, a love culminating in the Cross, the expression of his “marriage” with humanity and at the same time the origin and heart of the Eucharist. For this reason the Church manifests her particular spiritual closeness to all those who have built their family on the sacrament of Matrimony.[86] The family — the domestic Church[87] — is a primary sphere of the Church’s life, especially because of its decisive role in the Christian education of children.[88] In this context, the Synod also called for an acknowledgment of the unique mission of women in the family and in society, a mission that needs to be defended, protected and promoted.[89] Marriage and motherhood represent essential realities which must never be denigrated.

The Eucharist and the unicity of marriage
28. In the light of this intrinsic relationship between marriage, the family and the Eucharist, we can turn to several pastoral problems. The indissoluble, exclusive and faithful bond uniting Christ and the Church, which finds sacramental expression in the Eucharist, corresponds to the basic anthropological fact that man is meant to be definitively united to one woman and vice versa (cf. Gen 2:24, Mt 19:5). With this in mind, the Synod of Bishops addressed the question of pastoral practice regarding people who come to the Gospel from cultures in which polygamy is practiced. Those living in this situation who open themselves to Christian faith need to be helped to integrate their life-plan into the radical newness of Christ. During the catechumenate, Christ encounters them in their specific circumstances and calls them to embrace the full truth of love, making whatever sacrifices are necessary in order to arrive at perfect ecclesial communion. The Church accompanies them with a pastoral care that is gentle yet firm, above all by showing them the light shed by the Christian mysteries on nature and on human affections.

The Eucharist and the indissolubility of marriage

29. If the Eucharist expresses the irreconcilable nature of God’s love in Christ for his Church, we can then understand why it implies, with regard to the sacrament of Matrimony, that indissolubility to which all true love necessarily aspires. There was good reason for the pastoral attention that the Synod gave to the painful situations experienced by some of the faithful who, having celebrated the sacrament of Matrimony, then divorced and remarried. This represents a complex and troubling pastoral problem, a real scourge for contemporary society, and one which increasingly affects the Catholic community as well. The Church’s pastors, out of love for the truth, are obliged to discern different situations carefully, in order to be able to offer appropriate spiritual guidance to the faithful involved. The Synod of Bishops confirmed the Church’s practice, based on Sacred Scripture (cf. Mk 10:2-12), of not admitting the divorced and remarried to the sacraments, since their state and their condition of life objectively contradict the loving union of Christ and the Church signified and made present in the Eucharist. Yet the divorced and remarried continue to belong to the Church, which accompanies them with special concern and encourages them to live as fully as possible the Christian life through
regular participation at Mass, albeit without receiving communion, listening to the word of God, Eucharistic adoration, prayer, participation in the life of the community, honest dialogue with a priest or spiritual director, dedication to the life of charity, works of penance, and commitment to the education of their children.

When legitimate doubts exist about the validity of the prior sacramental marriage, the necessary investigation must be carried out to establish if these are well-founded. Consequently there is a need to ensure, in full respect for canon law, the presence of local ecclesiastical tribunals, their pastoral character, and their correct and prompt functioning. Each Diocese should have a sufficient number of persons with the necessary preparation, so that the ecclesiastical tribunals can operate in an expeditious manner. I repeat that “it is a grave obligation to bring the Church's institutional activity in her tribunals ever closer to the faithful.” At the same time, pastoral care must not be understood as if it were somehow in conflict with the law. Rather, one should begin by assuming that the fundamental point of encounter between the law and pastoral care is love for the truth: truth is never something purely abstract, but “a real part of the human and Christian journey of every member of the faithful.” Finally, where the nullity of the marriage bond is not declared and objective circumstances make it impossible to cease cohabitation, the Church encourages these members of the faithful to commit themselves to living their relationship in fidelity to the demands of God’s law, as friends, as brother and sister; in this way they will be able to return to the table of the Eucharist, taking care to observe the Church’s established and approved practice in this regard. This path, if it is to be possible and fruitful, must be supported by pastors and by adequate ecclesial initiatives, nor can it ever involve the blessing of these relations, lest confusion arise among the faithful concerning the value of marriage.

Given the complex cultural context which the Church today encounters in many countries, the Synod also recommended devoting maximum pastoral attention to training couples preparing for marriage and to ascertaining beforehand their convictions regarding the obligations required for the validity of the sacrament of Matrimony. Serious discernment in this matter will help to avoid situations where impulsive decisions or superficial
reasons lead two young people to take on responsibilities that they are then incapable of honoring.\[98] The good that the Church and society as a whole expect from marriage and from the family founded upon marriage is so great as to call for full pastoral commitment to this particular area. Marriage and the family are institutions that must be promoted and defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature, since whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself.

**The Eucharist and Eschatology**

*The Eucharist: a gift to men and women on their journey*

30. If it is true that the sacraments are part of the Church’s pilgrimage through history\[99] towards the full manifestation of the victory of the risen Christ, it is also true that, especially in the liturgy of the Eucharist, they give us a real foretaste of the eschatological fulfillment for which every human being and all creation are destined (cf. Rom 8:19ff.). Man is created for that true and eternal happiness which only God’s love can give. But our wounded freedom would go astray were it not already able to experience something of that future fulfillment. Moreover, to move forward in the right direction, we all need to be guided towards our final goal. That goal is Christ himself, the Lord who conquered sin and death, and who makes himself present to us in a special way in the Eucharistic celebration. Even though we remain “aliens and exiles” in this world (1 Pet 2:11), through faith we already share in the fullness of risen life. The Eucharistic banquet, by disclosing its powerful eschatological dimension, comes to the aid of our freedom as we continue our journey.

*The eschatological banquet*

31. Reflecting on this mystery, we can say that Jesus’ coming responded to an expectation present in the people of Israel, in the whole of humanity and ultimately in creation itself. By his self-gift, he objectively inaugurated the eschatological age. Christ came to gather together the scattered People of God (cf. Jn 11:52) and clearly manifested his intention to gather together the community of the covenant, in order to bring to fulfillment the promises made by God to the fathers of old (cf. Jer 23:3; Lk 1:55, 70). In the calling of the Twelve, which is to be understood in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel, and in the command he gave them at the Last
Supper, before his redemptive passion, to celebrate his memorial, Jesus showed that he wished to transfer to the entire community which he had founded the task of being, within history, the sign and instrument of the eschatological gathering that had its origin in him. Consequently, every Eucharistic celebration sacramentally accomplishes the eschatological gathering of the People of God. For us, the Eucharistic banquet is a real foretaste of the final banquet foretold by the prophets (cf. Is 25:6–9) and described in the New Testament as “the marriage-feast of the Lamb” (Rev 19:7–9), to be celebrated in the joy of the communion of saints[100].

**Prayer for the dead**

32. The Eucharistic celebration, in which we proclaim that Christ has died and risen, and will come again, is a pledge of the future glory in which our bodies too will be glorified. Celebrating the memorial of our salvation strengthens our hope in the resurrection of the body and in the possibility of meeting once again, face to face, those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. In this context, I wish, together with the Synod Fathers, to remind all the faithful of the importance of prayers for the dead, especially the offering of Mass for them, so that, once purified, they can come to the beatific vision of God.[101] A rediscovery of the eschatological dimension inherent in the Eucharist, celebrated and adored, will help sustain us on our journey and comfort us in the hope of glory (cf. Rom 5:2; Tit 2:13).

**The Eucharist and the Virgin Mary**

33. From the relationship between the Eucharist and the individual sacraments, and from the eschatological significance of the sacred mysteries, the overall shape of the Christian life emerges, a life called at all times to be an act of spiritual worship, a self-offering pleasing to God. Although we are all still journeying towards the complete fulfillment of our hope, this does not mean that we cannot already gratefully acknowledge that God’s gifts to us have found their perfect fulfillment in the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Mother. Mary’s Assumption body and soul into heaven is for us a sign of sure hope, for it shows us, on our pilgrimage through time, the eschatological goal of which the sacrament of the Eucharist enables us even now to have a foretaste.
In Mary most holy, we also see perfectly fulfilled the “sacramental” way that God comes down to meet his creatures and involves them in his saving work. From the Annunciation to Pentecost, Mary of Nazareth appears as someone whose freedom is completely open to God’s will. Her immaculate conception is revealed precisely in her unconditional docility to God’s word. Obedient faith in response to God’s work shapes her life at every moment. A virgin attentive to God’s word, she lives in complete harmony with his will; she treasures in her heart the words that come to her from God and, piecing them together like a mosaic, she learns to understand them more deeply (cf. Lk 2:19, 51); Mary is the great Believer who places herself confidently in God’s hands, abandoning herself to his will. This mystery deepens as she becomes completely involved in the redemptive mission of Jesus. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, “the blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son until she stood at the Cross, in keeping with the divine plan (cf. Jn 19:25), suffering deeply with her only-begotten Son, associating herself with his sacrifice in her mother’s heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of the victim who was born of her. Finally, she was given by the same Christ Jesus, dying on the Cross, as a mother to his disciple, with these words: ‘Woman, behold your Son.’” From the Annunciation to the Cross, Mary is the one who received the Word, made flesh within her and then silenced in death. It is she, lastly, who took into her arms the lifeless body of the one who truly loved his own “to the end” (Jn 13:1).

Consequently, every time we approach the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy, we also turn to her who, by her complete fidelity, received Christ’s sacrifice for the whole Church. The Synod Fathers rightly declared that “Mary inaugurates the Church’s participation in the sacrifice of the Redeemer.” She is the Immaculata, who receives God’s gift unconditionally and is thus associated with his work of salvation. Mary of Nazareth, icon of the nascent Church, is the model for each of us, called to receive the gift that Jesus makes of himself in the Eucharist.

PART TWO

THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY

TO BE CELEBRATED
“Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven;
my Father gives you the true bread from heaven” (Jn 6:32)

*Lex orandi and lex credendi*

34. The Synod of Bishops reflected at length on the intrinsic relationship between Eucharistic faith and Eucharistic celebration, pointing out the connection between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*, and stressing the primacy of the *liturgical action*. The Eucharist should be experienced as a mystery of faith, celebrated authentically and with a clear awareness that “the *intellectus fidei* has a primordial relationship to the Church’s liturgical action.”[105] Theological reflection in this area can never prescind from the sacramental order instituted by Christ himself. On the other hand, the liturgical action can never be considered generically, prescinding from the mystery of faith. Our faith and the Eucharistic liturgy both have their source in the same event: Christ’s gift of himself in the Paschal Mystery.

*Beauty and the liturgy*

35. This relationship between creed and worship is evidenced in a particular way by the rich theological and liturgical category of beauty. Like the rest of Christian Revelation, the liturgy is inherently linked to beauty: it is *veritatis splendor*. The liturgy is a radiant expression of the paschal mystery, in which Christ draws us to himself and calls us to communion. As Saint Bonaventure would say, in Jesus we contemplate beauty and splendor at their source.[106] This is no mere aestheticism, but the concrete way in which the truth of God’s love in Christ encounters us, attracts us and delights us, enabling us to emerge from ourselves and drawing us towards our true vocation, which is love.[107] God allows himself to be glimpsed first in creation, in the beauty and harmony of the cosmos (cf. *Wis* 13:5; *Rom* 1:19- 20). In the Old Testament we see many signs of the grandeur of God’s power as he manifests his glory in his wondrous deeds among the Chosen People (cf. *Ex* 14; 16:10; 24:12-18; *Num* 14:20–23). In the New Testament this epiphany of beauty reaches definitive fulfillment in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ:[108] Christ is the full manifestation of the glory of God. In the glorification of the Son, the Father’s glory shines forth and is communicated (cf. *Jn* 1:14; 8:54; 12:28; 17:1). Yet this beauty is not simply
a harmony of proportion and form; “the fairest of the sons of men” (Ps 45[44]:3) is also, mysteriously, the one “who had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Is 53:2). Jesus Christ shows us how the truth of love can transform even the dark mystery of death into the radiant light of the resurrection. Here the splendor of God’s glory surpasses all worldly beauty. The truest beauty is the love of God, who definitively revealed himself to us in the paschal mystery.

The beauty of the liturgy is part of this mystery; it is a sublime expression of God’s glory and, in a certain sense, a glimpse of heaven on earth. The memorial of Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice contains something of that beauty which Peter, James and John beheld when the Master, making his way to Jerusalem, was transfigured before their eyes (cf. Mk 9:2). Beauty, then, is not mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed, if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendor.

The Eucharistic celebration, the work of “Christus Totus”

Christus totus in capite et in corpore

36. The “subject” of the liturgy’s intrinsic beauty is Christ himself, risen and glorified in the Holy Spirit, who includes the Church in his work.[109] Here we can recall an evocative phrase of Saint Augustine which strikingly describes this dynamic of faith proper to the Eucharist. The great Bishop of Hippo, speaking specifically of the Eucharistic mystery, stresses the fact that Christ assimilates us to himself: “The bread you see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. The chalice, or rather, what the chalice contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. In these signs, Christ the Lord willed to entrust to us his body and the blood which he shed for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have received them properly, you yourselves are what you have received.”[110] Consequently, “not only have we become Christians, we have become Christ himself.”[111] We can thus contemplate God’s mysterious work, which brings about a profound unity between ourselves and the Lord Jesus: “one should not believe that Christ is in the head but not in the body; rather he is complete in the head and in the body.”[112]
The Eucharist and the risen Christ

37. Since the Eucharistic liturgy is essentially an actio Dei which draws us into Christ through the Holy Spirit, its basic structure is not something within our power to change, nor can it be held hostage by the latest trends. Here too Saint Paul’s irrefutable statement applies: “no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11). Again it is the Apostle of the Gentiles who assures us that, with regard to the Eucharist, he is presenting not his own teaching but what he himself has received (cf. 1 Cor 11:23). The celebration of the Eucharist implies and involves the living Tradition. The Church celebrates the Eucharistic sacrifice in obedience to Christ’s command, based on her experience of the Risen Lord and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, from the beginning, the Christian community has gathered for the fractio panis on the Lord’s Day. Sunday, the day Christ rose from the dead, is also the first day of the week, the day which the Old Testament tradition saw as the beginning of God’s work of creation. The day of creation has now become the day of the “new creation,” the day of our liberation, when we commemorate Christ who died and rose again[113].

Ars celebrandi

38. In the course of the Synod, there was frequent insistence on the need to avoid any antithesis between the ars celebrandi, the art of proper celebration, and the full, active and fruitful participation of all the faithful. The primary way to foster the participation of the People of God in the sacred rite is the proper celebration of the rite itself. The ars celebrandi is the best way to ensure their actuosa participatio.[114] The ars celebrandi is the fruit of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness; indeed, for two thousand years this way of celebrating has sustained the faith life of all believers, called to take part in the celebration as the People of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (cf. 1 Pet 2:4-5, 9)[115].

The Bishop, celebrant par excellence

39. While it is true that the whole People of God participates in the Eucharistic liturgy, a correct ars celebrandi necessarily entails a specific responsibility on the part of those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders. Bishops, priests, and deacons, each according to his proper rank,
must consider the celebration of the liturgy as their principal duty\textsuperscript{116}. Above all, this is true of the Diocesan Bishop: as “the chief steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to his care, he is the moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole of its liturgical life” \textsuperscript{117}. This is essential for the life of the particular Church, not only because communion with the Bishop is required for the lawfulness of every celebration within his territory, but also because he himself is the celebrant par excellence within his Diocese\textsuperscript{118}. It is his responsibility to ensure unity and harmony in the celebrations taking place in his territory. Consequently the Bishop must be “determined that the priests, the deacons, and the lay Christian faithful grasp ever more deeply the genuine meaning of the rites and liturgical texts, and thereby be led to an active and fruitful celebration of the Eucharist”\textsuperscript{119}. I would ask that every effort be made to ensure that the liturgies which the Bishop celebrates in his Cathedral are carried out with complete respect for the \textit{ars celebrandi}, so that they can be considered an example for the entire Diocese\textsuperscript{120}.

\textit{Respect for the liturgical books and the richness of signs}

40. Emphasizing the importance of the \textit{ars celebrandi} also leads to an appreciation of the value of the liturgical norms\textsuperscript{121}. The \textit{ars celebrandi} should foster a sense of the sacred and the use of outward signs which help to cultivate this sense, such as, for example, the harmony of the rite, the liturgical vestments, the furnishings and the sacred space. The Eucharistic celebration is enhanced when priests and liturgical leaders are committed to making known the current liturgical texts and norms, making available the great riches found in the \textit{General Instruction of the Roman Missal} and the \textit{Order of Readings for Mass}. Perhaps we take it for granted that our ecclesial communities already know and appreciate these resources, but this is not always the case. These texts contain riches which have preserved and expressed the faith and experience of the People of God over its two-thousand-year history. Equally important for a correct \textit{ars celebrandi} is an attentiveness to the various kinds of language that the liturgy employs: words and music, gestures and silence, movement, the liturgical colors of the vestments. By its very nature the liturgy operates on different levels of communication which enable it to engage the whole human person. The simplicity of its gestures and the sobriety of its orderly sequence of signs
communicate and inspire more than any contrived and inappropriate additions. Attentiveness and fidelity to the specific structure of the rite express both a recognition of the nature of Eucharist as a gift and, on the part of the minister, a docile openness to receiving this ineffable gift.

Art at the service of the liturgy

41. The profound connection between beauty and the liturgy should make us attentive to every work of art placed at the service of the celebration. Certainly an important element of sacred art is church architecture, which should highlight the unity of the furnishings of the sanctuary, such as the altar, the crucifix, the tabernacle, the ambo and the celebrant’s chair. Here it is important to remember that the purpose of sacred architecture is to offer the Church a fitting space for the celebration of the mysteries of faith, especially the Eucharist. The very nature of a Christian church is defined by the liturgy, which is an assembly of the faithful (ecclesia) who are the living stones of the Church (cf. 1 Pet 2:5).

This same principle holds true for sacred art in general, especially painting and sculpture, where religious iconography should be directed to sacramental mystagogy. A solid knowledge of the history of sacred art can be advantageous for those responsible for commissioning artists and architects to create works of art for the liturgy. Consequently it is essential that the education of seminarians and priests include the study of art history, with special reference to sacred buildings and the corresponding liturgical norms. Everything related to the Eucharist should be marked by beauty. Special respect and care must also be given to the vestments, the furnishings and the sacred vessels, so that by their harmonious and orderly arrangement they will foster awe for the mystery of God, manifest the unity of the faith and strengthen devotion.

Liturgical song

42. In the ars celebrandi, liturgical song has a pre-eminent place. Saint Augustine rightly says in a famous sermon that “the new man sings a new song. Singing is an expression of joy and, if we consider the matter, an expression of love.” The People of God assembled for the liturgy sings the praises of God. In the course of her two-thousand-year history, the Church has created, and still creates, music and songs which represent a
rich patrimony of faith and love. This heritage must not be lost. Certainly as far as the liturgy is concerned, we cannot say that one song is as good as another. Generic improvisation or the introduction of musical genres which fail to respect the meaning of the liturgy should be avoided. As an element of the liturgy, song should be well integrated into the overall celebration\[128\]. Consequently everything — texts, music, execution — ought to correspond to the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, the structure of the rite and the liturgical seasons\[129\]. Finally, while respecting various styles and different and highly praiseworthy traditions, I desire, in accordance with the request advanced by the Synod Fathers, that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed\[130\] as the chant proper to the Roman liturgy\[131\].

The structure of the Eucharistic Celebration

43. After mentioning the more significant elements of the *ars celebrandi* that emerged during the Synod, I would now like to turn to some specific aspects of the structure of the Eucharistic celebration which require special attention at the present time, if we are to remain faithful to the underlying intention of the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council, in continuity with the great ecclesial tradition.

The intrinsic unity of the liturgical action

44. First of all, there is a need to reflect on the inherent unity of the rite of Mass. Both in catechesis and in the actual manner of celebration, one must avoid giving the impression that the two parts of the rite are merely juxtaposed. The liturgy of the word and the Eucharistic liturgy, with the rites of introduction and conclusion, “are so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship.”\[132\] There is an intrinsic bond between the word of God and the Eucharist. From listening to the word of God, faith is born or strengthened (cf. *Rom* 10:17); in the Eucharist the Word made flesh gives himself to us as our spiritual food.\[133\] Thus, “from the two tables of the word of God and the Body of Christ, the Church receives and gives to the faithful the bread of life.”\[134\] Consequently it must constantly be kept in mind that the word of God, read and proclaimed by the Church in the liturgy, leads to the Eucharist as to its own connatural end.

The liturgy of the word
45. Together with the Synod, I ask that the liturgy of the word always be carefully prepared and celebrated. Consequently I urge that every effort be made to ensure that the liturgical proclamation of the word of God is entrusted to well-prepared readers. Let us never forget that “when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel”[135]. When circumstances so suggest, a few brief words of introduction could be offered in order to focus the attention of the faithful. If it is to be properly understood, the word of God must be listened to and accepted in a spirit of communion with the Church and with a clear awareness of its unity with the sacrament of the Eucharist. Indeed, the word which we proclaim and accept is the Word made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14); it is inseparably linked to Christ’s person and the sacramental mode of his continued presence in our midst. Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as he is present in the liturgical action. In this sacramental context of Christian revelation[136], knowledge and study of the word of God enable us better to appreciate, celebrate and live the Eucharist. Here too, we can see how true it is that “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ”[137].

To this end, the faithful should be helped to appreciate the riches of Sacred Scripture found in the lectionary through pastoral initiatives, liturgies of the word and reading in the context of prayer (lectio divina). Efforts should also be made to encourage those forms of prayer confirmed by tradition, such as the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer, and vigil celebrations. By praying the Psalms, the Scripture readings and the readings drawn from the great tradition which are included in the Divine Office, we can come to a deeper experience of the Christ-event and the economy of salvation, which in turn can enrich our understanding and participation in the celebration of the Eucharist[138].

The homily

46. Given the importance of the word of God, the quality of homilies needs to be improved. The homily is “part of the liturgical action”[139], and is meant to foster a deeper understanding of the word of God, so that it can bear fruit in the lives of the faithful. Hence ordained ministers must “prepare the homily carefully, based on an adequate knowledge of Sacred
Generic and abstract homilies should be avoided. In particular, I ask these ministers to preach in such a way that the homily closely relates the proclamation of the word of God to the sacramental celebration and the life of the community, so that the word of God truly becomes the Church’s vital nourishment and support. The catechetical and paraenetic aim of the homily should not be forgotten. During the course of the liturgical year it is appropriate to offer the faithful, prudently and on the basis of the three-year lectionary, “thematic” homilies treating the great themes of the Christian faith, on the basis of what has been authoritatively proposed by the Magisterium in the four “pillars” of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the recent Compendium, namely: the profession of faith, the celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ and Christian prayer.

*The presentation of the gifts*

47. The Synod Fathers also drew attention to the presentation of the gifts. This is not to be viewed simply as a kind of “interval” between the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. To do so would tend to weaken, at the least, the sense of a single rite made up of two interrelated parts. This humble and simple gesture is actually very significant: in the bread and wine that we bring to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father. In this way we also bring to the altar all the pain and suffering of the world, in the certainty that everything has value in God’s eyes. The authentic meaning of this gesture can be clearly expressed without the need for undue emphasis or complexity. It enables us to appreciate how God invites man to participate in bringing to fulfillment his handiwork, and in so doing, gives human labor its authentic meaning, since, through the celebration of the Eucharist, it is united to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.

*The Eucharistic Prayer*

48. The Eucharistic Prayer is “the centre and summit of the entire celebration”. Its importance deserves to be adequately emphasized. The different Eucharistic Prayers contained in the Missal have been handed down to us by the Church’s living Tradition and are noteworthy for their inexhaustible theological and spiritual richness. The faithful need to be
enabled to appreciate that richness. Here the General Instruction of the Roman Missal can help, with its list of the basic elements of every Eucharistic Prayer: thanksgiving, acclamation, epiclesis, institution narrative and consecration, anamnesis, offering, intercessions and final doxology\(^\text{[146]}\). In a particular way, Eucharistic spirituality and theological reflection are enriched if we contemplate in the anaphora the profound unity between the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the institution narrative\(^\text{[147]}\) whereby “the sacrifice is carried out which Christ himself instituted at the Last Supper”\(^\text{[148]}\). Indeed, “the Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated, that is, become Christ’s Body and Blood, and that the spotless Victim to be received in communion be for the salvation of those who will partake of it”\(^\text{[149]}\).

**The sign of peace**

49. By its nature the Eucharist is the sacrament of peace. At Mass this dimension of the Eucharistic mystery finds specific expression in the sign of peace. Certainly this sign has great value (cf. Jn 14:27). In our times, fraught with fear and conflict, this gesture has become particularly eloquent, as the Church has become increasingly conscious of her responsibility to pray insistently for the gift of peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family. Certainly there is an irrepressible desire for peace present in every heart. The Church gives voice to the hope for peace and reconciliation rising up from every man and woman of good will, directing it towards the one who “is our peace” (Eph 2:14) and who can bring peace to individuals and peoples when all human efforts fail. We can thus understand the emotion so often felt during the sign of peace at a liturgical celebration. Even so, during the Synod of Bishops there was discussion about the appropriateness of greater restraint in this gesture, which can be exaggerated and cause a certain distraction in the assembly just before the reception of Communion. It should be kept in mind that nothing is lost when the sign of peace is marked by a sobriety which preserves the proper spirit of the celebration, as, for example, when it is restricted to one’s immediate neighbors\(^\text{[150]}\).

**The distribution and reception of the Eucharist**

50. Another moment of the celebration needing to be mentioned is the
distribution and reception of Holy Communion. I ask everyone, especially ordained ministers and those who, after adequate preparation and in cases of genuine need, are authorized to exercise the ministry of distributing the Eucharist, to make every effort to ensure that this simple act preserves its importance as a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus in the sacrament. For the rules governing correct practice in this regard, I would refer to those documents recently issued on the subject.[151] All Christian communities are to observe the current norms faithfully, seeing in them an expression of the faith and love with which we all must regard this sublime sacrament. Furthermore, the precious time of thanksgiving after communion should not be neglected: besides the singing of an appropriate hymn, it can also be most helpful to remain recollected in silence.[152]

In this regard, I would like to call attention to a pastoral problem frequently encountered nowadays. I am referring to the fact that on certain occasions — for example, wedding Masses, funerals and the like — in addition to practicing Catholics there may be others present who have long since ceased to attend Mass or are living in a situation which does not permit them to receive the sacraments. At other times members of other Christian confessions and even other religions may be present. Similar situations can occur in churches that are frequently visited, especially in tourist areas. In these cases, there is a need to find a brief and clear way to remind those present of the meaning of sacramental communion and the conditions required for its reception. Wherever circumstances make it impossible to ensure that the meaning of the Eucharist is duly appreciated, the appropriateness of replacing the celebration of the Mass with a celebration of the word of God should be considered.[153]

The dismissal: “Ite, missa est”

51. Finally, I would like to comment briefly on the observations of the Synod Fathers regarding the dismissal at the end of the Eucharistic celebration. After the blessing, the deacon or the priest dismisses the people with the words: Ite, missa est. These words help us to grasp the relationship between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world. In antiquity, missa simply meant “dismissal.” However in Christian usage it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word “dismissal” has come to imply a “mission.” These few words succinctly express the
missionary nature of the Church. The People of God might be helped to understand more clearly this essential dimension of the Church's life, taking the dismissal as a starting-point. In this context, it might also be helpful to provide new texts, duly approved, for the prayer over the people and the final blessing, in order to make this connection clear.[154]

Actuosa participatio

Authentic participation

52. The Second Vatican Council rightly emphasized the active, full and fruitful participation of the entire People of God in the Eucharistic celebration.[155] Certainly, the renewal carried out in these past decades has made considerable progress towards fulfilling the wishes of the Council Fathers. Yet we must not overlook the fact that some misunderstanding has occasionally arisen concerning the precise meaning of this participation. It should be made clear that the word “participation” does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. In fact, the active participation called for by the Council must be understood in more substantial terms, on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life. The conciliar Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium encouraged the faithful to take part in the Eucharistic liturgy not “as strangers or silent spectators,” but as participants “in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, actively and devoutly”[156]. This exhortation has lost none of its force. The Council went on to say that the faithful “should be instructed by God’s word, and nourished at the table of the Lord’s Body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to make an offering of themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other”[157].

Participation and the priestly ministry

53. The beauty and the harmony of the liturgy find eloquent expression in the order by which everyone is called to participate actively. This entails an acknowledgment of the distinct hierarchical roles involved in the celebration. It is helpful to recall that active participation is not per se equivalent to the exercise of a specific ministry. The active participation of
the laity does not benefit from the confusion arising from an inability to distinguish, within the Church’s communion, the different functions proper to each one. There is a particular need for clarity with regard to the specific functions of the priest. He alone, and no other, as the tradition of the Church attests, presides over the entire Eucharistic celebration, from the initial greeting to the final blessing. In virtue of his reception of Holy Orders, he represents Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, and, in a specific way, also the Church herself. Every celebration of the Eucharist, in fact, is led by the Bishop, “either in person or through priests who are his helpers.” He is helped by a deacon, who has specific duties during the celebration: he prepares the altar, assists the priest, proclaims the Gospel, preaches the homily from time to time, reads the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful, and distributes the Eucharist to the faithful.

Associated with these ministries linked to the sacrament of Holy Orders, there are also other ministries of liturgical service which can be carried out in a praiseworthy manner by religious and properly trained laity.

*The Eucharistic celebration and inculturation*

54. On the basis of these fundamental statements of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod Fathers frequently stressed the importance of the active participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic sacrifice. In order to foster this participation, provision may be made for a number of adaptations appropriate to different contexts and cultures. The fact that certain abuses have occurred does not detract from this clear principle, which must be upheld in accordance with the real needs of the Church as she lives and celebrates the one mystery of Christ in a variety of cultural situations. In the mystery of the Incarnation, the Lord Jesus, born of woman and fully human (cf. Gal 4:4), entered directly into a relationship not only with the expectations present within the Old Testament, but also with those of all peoples. He thus showed that God wishes to encounter us in our own concrete situation. A more effective participation of the faithful in the holy mysteries will thus benefit from the continued inculturation of the Eucharistic celebration, with due regard for the possibilities for adaptation provided in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, interpreted in the light of the criteria laid down by the Fourth Instruction of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the
Sacraments *Varietates Legitimae* of 25 January 1994[165] and the directives expressed by Pope John Paul II in the Post-Synodal Exhortations *Ecclesia in Africa, Ecclesia in America, Ecclesia in Asia, Ecclesia in Oceania and Ecclesia in Europa*[166]. To this end, I encourage Episcopal Conferences to strive to maintain a proper balance between the criteria and directives already issued and new adaptations[167], always in accord with the Apostolic See.

**Personal conditions for an “active participation”**

55. In their consideration of the *actuosa participatio* of the faithful in the liturgy, the Synod Fathers also discussed the personal conditions required for fruitful participation on the part of individuals[168] One of these is certainly the spirit of constant conversion which must mark the lives of all the faithful. Active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy can hardly be expected if one approaches it superficially, without an examination of his or her life. This inner disposition can be fostered, for example, by recollection and silence for at least a few moments before the beginning of the liturgy, by fasting and, when necessary, by sacramental confession. A heart reconciled to God makes genuine participation possible. The faithful need to be reminded that there can be no *actuosa participatio* in the sacred mysteries without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring Christ’s love into the life of society.

Clearly, full participation in the Eucharist takes place when the faithful approach the altar in person to receive communion[169]. Yet true as this is, care must be taken lest they conclude that the mere fact of their being present in church during the liturgy gives them a right or even an obligation to approach the table of the Eucharist. Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion, praised by Pope John Paul II[170] and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life[171].

**Participation by Christians who are not Catholic**

56. The subject of participation in the Eucharist inevitably raises the question of Christians belonging to Churches or Ecclesial Communities
not in full communion with the Catholic Church. In this regard, it must be said that the intrinsic link between the Eucharist and the Church’s unity inspires us to long for the day when we will be able to celebrate the Holy Eucharist together with all believers in Christ, and in this way to express visibly the fullness of unity that Christ willed for his disciples (cf. Jn 17:21). On the other hand, the respect we owe to the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood prevents us from making it a mere “means” to be used indiscriminately in order to attain that unity. The Eucharist in fact not only manifests our personal communion with Jesus Christ, but also implies full communio with the Church. This is the reason why, sadly albeit not without hope, we ask Christians who are not Catholic to understand and respect our conviction, which is grounded in the Bible and Tradition. We hold that Eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion are so linked as to make it generally impossible for non-Catholic Christians to receive the former without enjoying the latter. There would be even less sense in actually concelebrating with ministers of Churches or ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church. Yet it remains true that, for the sake of their eternal salvation, individual non-Catholic Christians can be admitted to the Eucharist, the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. But this is possible only in specific, exceptional situations and requires that certain precisely defined conditions be met. These are clearly indicated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and in its Compendium. Everyone is obliged to observe these norms faithfully.

Participation through the communications media

57. Thanks to the remarkable development of the communications media, the word “participation” has taken on a broader meaning in recent decades. We all gladly acknowledge that the media have also opened up new possibilities for the celebration of the Eucharist. This requires a specific preparation and a keen sense of responsibility on the part of pastoral workers in the sector. When Mass is broadcast on television, it inevitably tends to set an example. Particular care should therefore be taken to ensure that, in addition to taking place in suitable and well-appointed locations, the celebration respects the liturgical norms in force.

Finally, with regard to the value of taking part in Mass via the communications media, those who hear or view these broadcasts should be
aware that, under normal circumstances, they do not fulfill the obligation of attending Mass. Visual images can represent reality, but they do not actually reproduce it.[177] While it is most praiseworthy that the elderly and the sick participate in Sunday Mass through radio and television, the same cannot be said of those who think that such broadcasts dispense them from going to church and sharing in the Eucharistic assembly in the living Church.

**Active participation by the sick**

58. In thinking of those who cannot attend places of worship for reasons of health or advanced age, I wish to call the attention of the whole Church community to the pastoral importance of providing spiritual assistance to the sick, both those living at home and those in hospital. Their situation was often mentioned during the Synod of Bishops. These brothers and sisters of ours should have the opportunity to receive sacramental communion frequently. In this way they can strengthen their relationship with Christ, crucified and risen, and feel fully involved in the Church’s life and mission by the offering of their sufferings in union with our Lord’s sacrifice. Particular attention needs to be given to the disabled. When their condition so permits, the Christian community should make it possible for them to attend the place of worship. Buildings should be designed to provide ready access to the disabled. Finally, whenever possible, Eucharistic communion should be made available to the mentally handicapped, if they are baptized and confirmed: they receive the Eucharist in the faith also of the family or the community that accompanies them.[178]

**Care for prisoners**

59. The Church’s spiritual tradition, basing itself on Christ’s own words (cf. Mt 25:36), has designated the visiting of prisoners as one of the corporal works of mercy. Prisoners have a particular need to be visited personally by the Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Experiencing the closeness of the ecclesial community, sharing in the Eucharist and receiving holy communion at this difficult and painful time can surely contribute to the quality of a prisoner’s faith journey and to full social rehabilitation. Taking up the recommendation of the Synod, I ask Dioceses to do whatever is possible to ensure that sufficient pastoral resources are invested in the spiritual care of prisoners.[179]
Migrants and participation in the Eucharist

60. Turning now to those people who for various reasons are forced to leave their native countries, the Synod expressed particular gratitude to all those engaged in the pastoral care of migrants. Specific attention needs to be paid to migrants belonging to the Eastern Catholic Churches; in addition to being far from home, they also encounter the difficulty of not being able to participate in the Eucharistic liturgy in their own rite. For this reason, wherever possible, they should be served by priests of their rite. In all cases I would ask Bishops to welcome these brothers and sisters with the love of Christ. Contacts between the faithful of different rites can prove a source of mutual enrichment. In particular, I am thinking of the benefit that can come, especially for the clergy, from a knowledge of the different traditions.\[180\]

Large-scale concelebrations

61. The Synod considered the quality of participation in the case of large-scale celebrations held on special occasions and involving not only a great number of the lay faithful, but also many concelebrating priests.\[181\] On the one hand, it is easy to appreciate the importance of these moments, especially when the Bishop himself celebrates, surrounded by his presbyterate and by thedeacons. On the other hand, it is not always easy in such cases to give clear expression to the unity of the presbyterate, especially during the Eucharistic Prayer and the distribution of Holy Communion. Efforts need to be made lest these large-scale concelebrations lose their proper focus. This can be done by proper coordination and by arranging the place of worship so that priests and lay faithful are truly able to participate fully. It should be kept in mind, however, that here we are speaking of exceptional concelebrations, limited to extraordinary situations.

The Latin language

62. None of the above observations should cast doubt upon the importance of such large-scale liturgies. I am thinking here particularly of celebrations at international gatherings, which nowadays are held with greater frequency. The most should be made of these occasions. In order to express more clearly the unity and universality of the Church, I wish to endorse the proposal made by the Synod of Bishops, in harmony with the
directives of the Second Vatican Council,[182] that, with the exception of the readings, the homily and the prayer of the faithful, it is fitting that such liturgies be celebrated in Latin. Similarly, the better-known prayers[183] of the Church’s tradition should be recited in Latin and, if possible, selections of Gregorian chant should be sung. Speaking more generally, I ask that future priests, from their time in the seminary, receive the preparation needed to understand and to celebrate Mass in Latin, and also to use Latin texts and execute Gregorian chant; nor should we forget that the faithful can be taught to recite the more common prayers in Latin, and also to sing parts of the liturgy to Gregorian chant.[184]

**Eucharistic celebrations in small groups**

63. A very different situation arises when, in the interest of more conscious, active and fruitful participation, pastoral circumstances favor small group celebrations. While acknowledging the formative value of this approach, it must be stated that such celebrations should always be consonant with the overall pastoral activity of the Diocese. These celebrations would actually lose their catechetical value if they were felt to be in competition with, or parallel to, the life of the particular Church. In this regard, the Synod set forth some necessary criteria: small groups must serve to unify the community, not to fragment it; the beneficial results ought to be clearly evident; these groups should encourage the fruitful participation of the entire assembly, and preserve as much as possible the unity of the liturgical life of individual families.[185]

**Interior participation in the celebration**

*Mystagogical catechesis*

64. The Church’s great liturgical tradition teaches us that fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that one be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering one’s life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world. For this reason, the Synod of Bishops asked that the faithful be helped to make their interior dispositions correspond to their gestures and words. Otherwise, however carefully planned and executed our liturgies may be, they would risk falling into a certain ritualism. Hence the need to provide an education in Eucharistic faith capable of enabling the faithful to live personally what
they celebrate. Given the vital importance of this personal and conscious participatio, what methods of formation are needed? The Synod Fathers unanimously indicated, in this regard, a mystagogical approach to catechesis, which would lead the faithful to understand more deeply the mysteries being celebrated. In particular, given the close relationship between the ars celebrandi and an actuosa participatio, it must first be said that “the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well.”

By its nature, the liturgy can be pedagogically effective in helping the faithful to enter more deeply into the mystery being celebrated. That is why, in the Church’s most ancient tradition, the process of Christian formation always had an experiential character. While not neglecting a systematic understanding of the content of the faith, it centered on a vital and convincing encounter with Christ, as proclaimed by authentic witnesses. It is first and foremost the witness who introduces others to the mysteries. Naturally, this initial encounter gains depth through catechesis and finds its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist. This basic structure of the Christian experience calls for a process of mystagogy which should always respect three elements:

a) It interprets the rites in the light of the events of our salvation, in accordance with the Church’s living tradition. The celebration of the Eucharist, in its infinite richness, makes constant reference to salvation history. In Christ crucified and risen, we truly celebrate the one who has united all things in himself (cf. Eph 1:10). From the beginning, the Christian community has interpreted the events of Jesus’ life, and the Paschal Mystery in particular, in relation to the entire history of the Old Testament.

b) A mystagogical catechesis must also be concerned with presenting the meaning of the signs contained in the rites. This is particularly important in a highly technological age like our own, which risks losing the ability to appreciate signs and symbols. More than simply conveying information, a mystagogical catechesis should be capable of making the faithful more sensitive to the language of signs and gestures which, together with the word, make up the rite.

c) Finally, a mystagogical catechesis must be concerned with bringing out the significance of the rites for the Christian life in all its dimensions —
work and responsibility, thoughts and emotions, activity and repose. Part of the mystagogical process is to demonstrate how the mysteries celebrated in the rite are linked to the missionary responsibility of the faithful. The mature fruit of mystagogy is an awareness that one’s life is being progressively transformed by the holy mysteries being celebrated. The aim of all Christian education, moreover, is to train the believer in an adult faith that can make him a “new creation”, capable of bearing witness in his surroundings to the Christian hope that inspires him.

If we are to succeed in carrying out this work of education in our ecclesial communities, those responsible for formation must be adequately prepared. Indeed, the whole people of God should feel involved in this formation. Each Christian community is called to be a place where people can be taught about the mysteries celebrated in faith. In this regard, the Synod Fathers called for greater involvement by communities of consecrated life, movements and groups which, by their specific charisms, can give new impetus to Christian formation.[188] In our time, too, the Holy Spirit freely bestows his gifts to sustain the apostolic mission of the Church, which is charged with spreading the faith and bringing it to maturity.[189]

Reverence for the Eucharist

65. A convincing indication of the effectiveness of Eucharistic catechesis is surely an increased sense of the mystery of God present among us. This can be expressed in concrete outward signs of reverence for the Eucharist which the process of mystagogy should inculcate in the faithful.[190] I am thinking in general of the importance of gestures and posture, such as kneeling during the central moments of the Eucharistic Prayer. Amid the legitimate diversity of signs used in the context of different cultures, everyone should be able to experience and express the awareness that at each celebration we stand before the infinite majesty of God, who comes to us in the lowliness of the sacramental signs.

Adoration and Eucharistic devotion

The intrinsic relationship between celebration and adoration

66. One of the most moving moments of the Synod came when we gathered in Saint Peter’s Basilica, together with a great number of the faithful, for Eucharistic adoration. In this act of prayer, and not just in
words, the assembly of Bishops wanted to point out the intrinsic relationship between Eucharistic celebration and Eucharistic adoration. A growing appreciation of this significant aspect of the Church's faith has been an important part of our experience in the years following the liturgical renewal desired by the Second Vatican Council. During the early phases of the reform, the inherent relationship between Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not always perceived with sufficient clarity. For example, an objection that was widespread at the time argued that the Eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. In the light of the Church's experience of prayer, however, this was seen to be a false dichotomy. As Saint Augustine put it: “nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando — no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it.”[191] In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; Eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the Eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration.[192] Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, “only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another.”[193]

The practice of Eucharistic adoration

67. With the Synod Assembly, therefore, I heartily recommend to the Church's pastors and to the People of God the practice of Eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community.[194] Great benefit would ensue from a suitable catechesis explaining the importance of this act of worship, which enables the faithful to experience the liturgical celebration more fully and more fruitfully. Wherever possible, it would be appropriate, especially in densely populated areas, to set aside specific churches or oratories for perpetual adoration. I also recommend that, in their
catechetical training, and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist.

Here I would like to express appreciation and support for all those Institutes of Consecrated Life whose members dedicate a significant amount of time to Eucharistic adoration. In this way they give us an example of lives shaped by the Lord’s real presence. I would also like to encourage those associations of the faithful and confraternities specifically devoted to Eucharistic adoration; they serve as a leaven of contemplation for the whole Church and a summons to individuals and communities to place Christ at the center of their lives.

**Forms of Eucharistic devotion**

68. The personal relationship which the individual believer establishes with Jesus present in the Eucharist constantly points beyond itself to the whole communion of the Church and nourishes a fuller sense of membership in the Body of Christ. For this reason, besides encouraging individual believers to make time for personal prayer before the Sacrament of the Altar, I feel obliged to urge parishes and other church groups to set aside times for collective adoration. Naturally, already existing forms of Eucharistic piety retain their full value. I am thinking, for example, of processions with the Blessed Sacrament, especially the traditional procession on the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, the Forty Hours devotion, local, national and international Eucharistic Congresses, and other similar initiatives. If suitably updated and adapted to local circumstances, these forms of devotion are still worthy of being practiced today.[195]

**The location of the tabernacle**

69. In considering the importance of Eucharistic reservation and adoration, and reverence for the sacrament of Christ’s sacrifice, the Synod of Bishops also discussed the question of the proper placement of the tabernacle in our churches.[196] The correct positioning of the tabernacle contributes to the recognition of Christ’s real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Therefore, the place where the Eucharistic species are reserved, marked by a sanctuary lamp, should be readily visible to everyone entering
the church. It is therefore necessary to take into account the building’s architecture: in churches which do not have a Blessed Sacrament chapel, and where the high altar with its tabernacle is still in place, it is appropriate to continue to use this structure for the reservation and adoration of the Eucharist, taking care not to place the celebrant’s chair in front of it. In new churches, it is good to position the Blessed Sacrament chapel close to the sanctuary; where this is not possible, it is preferable to locate the tabernacle in the sanctuary, in a sufficiently elevated place, at the center of the apse area, or in another place where it will be equally conspicuous. Attention to these considerations will lend dignity to the tabernacle, which must always be cared for, also from an artistic standpoint. Obviously it is necessary to follow the provisions of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal in this regard. In any event, final judgment on these matters belongs to the Diocesan Bishop.

PART THREE

THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY

TO BE LIVED

“As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57)

The Eucharistic form of the Christian life

Spiritual worship - logiké latreía (Rom 12:1)

70. The Lord Jesus, who became for us the food of truth and love, speaks of the gift of his life and assures us that “if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever” (Jn 6:51). This “eternal life” begins in us even now, thanks to the transformation effected in us by the gift of the Eucharist: “He who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57). These words of Jesus make us realize how the mystery “believed” and “celebrated” contains an innate power making it the principle of new life within us and the form of our Christian existence. By receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ we become sharers in the divine life in an ever more adult and conscious way. Here too, we can apply Saint Augustine's words, in his Confessions, about the eternal Logos as the food of our souls. Stressing the mysterious nature of this food, Augustine imagines the Lord saying to him: “I am the food of
grown men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh, into yourself, but you shall be changed into me.”[198] It is not the Eucharistic food that is changed into us, but rather we who are mysteriously transformed by it. Christ nourishes us by uniting us to himself; “he draws us into himself.”[199]

Here the Eucharistic celebration appears in all its power as the source and summit of the Church’s life, since it expresses at once both the origin and the fulfillment of the new and definitive worship of God, the logiké latreía.[200] Saint Paul’s exhortation to the Romans in this regard is a concise description of how the Eucharist makes our whole life a spiritual worship pleasing to God: “I appeal to you therefore, my brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). In these words the new worship appears as a total self-offering made in communion with the whole Church. The Apostle’s insistence on the offering of our bodies emphasizes the concrete human reality of a worship which is anything but disincarnate. The Bishop of Hippo goes on to say that “this is the sacrifice of Christians: that we, though many, are one body in Christ. The Church celebrates this mystery in the sacrament of the altar, as the faithful know, and there she shows them clearly that in what is offered, she herself is offered.”[201] Catholic doctrine, in fact, affirms that the Eucharist, as the sacrifice of Christ, is also the sacrifice of the Church, and thus of all the faithful.[202] This insistence on sacrifice — a “making sacred” — expresses all the existential depth implied in the transformation of our human reality as taken up by Christ (cf. Phil 3:12).

The all-encompassing effect of Eucharistic worship

71. Christianity’s new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the intrinsically Eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape. The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. Rom 8:29ff.). There is nothing authentically human — our thoughts and affections, our words and deeds — that does not find in
the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full. Here we can see the full human import of the radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist: the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence. Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God. The glory of God is the living man (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). And the life of man is the vision of God.\[203\]

Iuxta dominicam viventes — living in accordance with the Lord’s Day

72. From the beginning Christians were clearly conscious of this radical newness which the Eucharist brings to human life. The faithful immediately perceived the profound influence of the Eucharistic celebration on their manner of life. Saint Ignatius of Antioch expressed this truth when he called Christians “those who have attained a new hope,” and described them as “those living in accordance with the Lord’s Day” (iuxta dominicam viventes).\[204\] This phrase of the great Antiochene martyr highlights the connection between the reality of the Eucharist and everyday Christian life. The Christians’ customary practice of gathering on the first day after the Sabbath to celebrate the resurrection of Christ — according to the account of Saint Justin Martyr\[205\] — is also what defines the form of a life renewed by an encounter with Christ. Saint Ignatius’ phrase — “living in accordance with the Lord’s Day” — also emphasizes that this holy day becomes paradigmatic for every other day of the week. Indeed, it is defined by something more than the simple suspension of one’s ordinary activities, a sort of parenthesis in one’s usual daily rhythm. Christians have always experienced this day as the first day of the week, since it commemorates the radical newness brought by Christ. Sunday is thus the day when Christians rediscover the Eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have. “Living in accordance with the Lord’s Day” means living in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God, so that his victory may be fully revealed to all humanity through a profoundly renewed existence.

Living the Sunday obligation

73. Conscious of this new vital principle which the Eucharist imparts to
the Christian, the Synod Fathers reaffirmed the importance of the Sunday obligation for all the faithful, viewing it as a wellspring of authentic freedom enabling them to live each day in accordance with what they celebrated on “the Lord’s Day.” The life of faith is endangered when we lose the desire to share in the celebration of the Eucharist and its commemoration of the paschal victory. Participating in the Sunday liturgical assembly with all our brothers and sisters, with whom we form one body in Jesus Christ, is demanded by our Christian conscience and at the same time it forms that conscience. To lose a sense of Sunday as the Lord’s Day, a day to be sanctified, is symptomatic of the loss of an authentic sense of Christian freedom, the freedom of the children of God. Here some observations made by my venerable predecessor John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter Dies Domini continue to have great value. Speaking of the various dimensions of the Christian celebration of Sunday, he said that it is Dies Domini with regard to the work of creation, Dies Christi as the day of the new creation and the Risen Lord’s gift of the Holy Spirit, Dies Ecclesiae as the day on which the Christian community gathers for the celebration, and Dies hominis as the day of joy, rest and fraternal charity.

Sunday thus appears as the primordial holy day, when all believers, wherever they are found, can become heralds and guardians of the true meaning of time. It gives rise to the Christian meaning of life and a new way of experiencing time, relationships, work, life and death. On the Lord’s Day, then, it is fitting that Church groups should organize, around Sunday Mass, the activities of the Christian community: social gatherings, programs for the faith formation of children, young people and adults, pilgrimages, charitable works, and different moments of prayer. For the sake of these important values — while recognizing that Saturday evening, beginning with First Vespers, is already a part of Sunday and a time when the Sunday obligation can be fulfilled — we need to remember that it is Sunday itself that is meant to be kept holy, lest it end up as a day “empty of God.”

The meaning of rest and of work

74. Finally, it is particularly urgent nowadays to remember that the day of the Lord is also a day of rest from work. It is greatly to be hoped that
this fact will also be recognized by civil society, so that individuals can be permitted to refrain from work without being penalized. Christians, not without reference to the meaning of the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition, have seen in the Lord’s Day a day of rest from their daily exertions. This is highly significant, for it relativizes work and directs it to the person: work is for man and not man for work. It is easy to see how this actually protects men and women, emancipating them from a possible form of enslavement. As I have had occasion to say, “work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus, it must always be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good. At the same time, it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or to idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life.”

Sunday assemblies in the absence of a priest

75. Rediscovering the significance of the Sunday celebration for the life of Christians naturally leads to a consideration of the problem of those Christian communities which lack priests and where, consequently, it is not possible to celebrate Mass on the Lord’s Day. Here it should be stated that a wide variety of situations exists. The Synod recommended first that the faithful should go to one of the churches in their Diocese where the presence of a priest is assured, even when this demands a certain sacrifice. Wherever great distances make it practically impossible to take part in the Sunday Eucharist, it is still important for Christian communities to gather together to praise the Lord and to commemorate the Day set apart for him. This needs, however, to be accompanied by an adequate instruction about the difference between Mass and Sunday assemblies in the absence of a priest. The Church’s pastoral care must be expressed in the latter case by ensuring that the liturgy of the word — led by a deacon or a community leader to whom this ministry has been duly entrusted by competent authority — is carried out according to a specific ritual prepared and approved for this purpose by the Bishops’ Conferences. I reiterate that only Ordinaries may grant the faculty of distributing holy communion in such liturgies, taking account of the need for a certain selectiveness.
Furthermore, care should be taken that these assemblies do not create confusion about the central role of the priest and the sacraments in the life of the Church. The importance of the role given to the laity, who should rightly be thanked for their generosity in the service of their communities, must never obscure the indispensable ministry of priests for the life of the Church.[213] Hence care must be taken to ensure that such assemblies in the absence of a priest do not encourage ecclesiological visions incompatible with the truth of the Gospel and the Church’s tradition. Rather, they should be privileged moments of prayer for God to send holy priests after his own heart. It is touching, in this regard, to read the words of Pope John Paul II in his Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 1979 about those places where the faithful, deprived of a priest by a dictatorial regime, would meet in a church or shrine, place on the altar a stole which they still kept and recite the prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy, halting in silence “at the moment that corresponds to the transubstantiation,” as a sign of how “ardently they desire to hear the words that only the lips of a priest can efficaciously utter.”[214] With this in mind, and considering the incomparable good which comes from the celebration of the Eucharist, I ask all priests to visit willingly and as often as possible the communities entrusted to their pastoral care, lest they remain too long without the sacrament of love.

A Eucharistic form of Christian life, membership in the Church

76. The importance of Sunday as the Dies Ecclesiae brings us back to the intrinsic relationship between Jesus’ victory over evil and death, and our membership in his ecclesial body. On the Lord’s Day, each Christian rediscovers the communal dimension of his life as one who has been redeemed. Taking part in the liturgy and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ intensifies and deepens our belonging to the one who died for us (cf. 1 Cor 6:19ff; 7:23). Truly, whoever eats of Christ lives for him. The Eucharistic mystery helps us to understand the profound meaning of the communio sanctorum. Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and a horizontal sense: it is communion with God and communion with our brothers and sisters. Both dimensions mysteriously converge in the gift of the Eucharist. “Wherever communion with God, which is communion with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit, is
destroyed, the root and source of our communion with one another is destroyed. And wherever we do not live communion among ourselves, communion with the Triune God is not alive and true either.”[215] Called to be members of Christ and thus members of one another (cf. 1 Cor 12:27), we are a reality grounded ontologically in Baptism and nourished by the Eucharist, a reality that demands visible expression in the life of our communities.

The Eucharistic form of Christian life is clearly an ecclesial and communitarian form. Through the Diocese and the parish, the fundamental structures of the Church in a particular territory, each individual believer can experience concretely what it means to be a member of Christ’s Body. Associations, ecclesial movements and new communities — with their lively charisms bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the needs of our time — together with Institutes of Consecrated Life, have a particular responsibility for helping to make the faithful conscious that they belong to the Lord (cf. Rom 14:8). Secularization, with its inherent emphasis on individualism, has its most negative effects on individuals who are isolated and lack a sense of belonging. Christianity, from its very beginning, has meant fellowship, a network of relationships constantly strengthened by hearing God’s word and sharing in the Eucharist, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

Spirituality and Eucharistic culture

77. Significantly, the Synod Fathers stated that “the Christian faithful need a fuller understanding of the relationship between the Eucharist and their daily lives. Eucharistic spirituality is not just participation in Mass and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It embraces the whole of life.”[216] This observation is particularly insightful, given our situation today. It must be acknowledged that one of the most serious effects of the secularization just mentioned is that it has relegated the Christian faith to the margins of life as if it were irrelevant to everyday affairs. The futility of this way of living — “as if God did not exist” — is now evident to everyone. Today there is a need to rediscover that Jesus Christ is not just a private conviction or an abstract idea, but a real person, whose becoming part of human history is capable of renewing the life of every man and woman. Hence the Eucharist, as the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission, must be
translated into spirituality, into a life lived “according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4ff.; cf. Gal 5:16, 25). It is significant that Saint Paul, in the passage of the Letter to the Romans where he invites his hearers to offer the new spiritual worship, also speaks of the need for a change in their way of living and thinking: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (12:2). In this way the Apostle of the Gentiles emphasizes the link between true spiritual worship and the need for a new way of understanding and living one’s life. An integral part of the Eucharistic form of the Christian life is a new way of thinking, “so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14).

The Eucharist and the evangelization of cultures

78. From what has been said thus far, it is clear that the Eucharistic mystery puts us in dialogue with various cultures, but also in some way challenges them. The intercultural character of this new worship, this logiké latreía, needs to be recognized. The presence of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are events capable of engaging every cultural reality and bringing to it the leaven of the Gospel. It follows that we must be committed to promoting the evangelization of cultures, conscious that Christ himself is the truth for every man and woman, and for all human history. The Eucharist becomes a criterion for our evaluation of everything that Christianity encounters in different cultures. In this important process of discernment, we can appreciate the full meaning of Saint Paul’s exhortation, in his First Letter to the Thessalonians, to “test everything; and hold fast to what is good” (5:21).

The Eucharist and the lay faithful

79. In Christ, Head of his Body, the Church, all Christians are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people he claims for his own, to declare his wonderful deeds” (1 Pet 2:9). The Eucharist, as a mystery to be “lived”, meets each of us as we are, and makes our concrete existence the place where we experience daily the radical newness of the Christian life. The Eucharistic sacrifice nourishes and increases within us all that we have already received at Baptism, with its call to holiness, and this must be clearly evident from the way individual Christians live their
lives. Day by day we become “a worship pleasing to God” by living our lives as a vocation. Beginning with the liturgical assembly, the sacrament of the Eucharist itself commits us, in our daily lives, to doing everything for God’s glory.

And because the world is “the field” (Mt 13:38) in which God plants his children as good seed, the Christian laity, by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, and strengthened by the Eucharist, are called to live out the radical newness brought by Christ wherever they find themselves. They should cultivate a desire that the Eucharist have an ever deeper effect on their daily lives, making them convincing witnesses in the workplace and in society at large. I encourage families in particular to draw inspiration and strength from this sacrament. The love between man and woman, openness to life, and the raising of children are privileged spheres in which the Eucharist can reveal its power to transform life and give it its full meaning. The Church’s pastors should unfailingly support, guide and encourage the lay faithful to live fully their vocation to holiness within this world which God so loved that he gave his Son to become its salvation (cf. Jn 3:16).

*The Eucharist and priestly spirituality*

80. The Eucharistic form of the Christian life is seen in a very special way in the priesthood. Priestly spirituality is intrinsically Eucharistic. The seeds of this spirituality are already found in the words spoken by the Bishop during the ordination liturgy: “Receive the oblation of the holy people to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord’s Cross.” In order to give an ever greater Eucharistic form to his existence, the priest, beginning with his years in the seminary, should make his spiritual life his highest priority. He is called to seek God tirelessly, while remaining attuned to the concerns of his brothers and sisters. An intense spiritual life will enable him to enter more deeply into communion with the Lord and to let himself be possessed by God’s love, bearing witness to that love at all times, even the darkest and most difficult. To this end I join the Synod Fathers in recommending “the daily celebration of Mass, even when the faithful are not present.” This recommendation is consistent with the objectively infinite value of every celebration of the Eucharist, and is
motivated by the Mass’s unique spiritual fruitfulness. If celebrated in a faith-filled and attentive way, Mass is formative in the deepest sense of the word, since it fosters the priest’s configuration to Christ and strengthens him in his vocation.

*The Eucharist and the consecrated life*

81. The relationship of the Eucharist to the various ecclesial vocations is seen in a particularly vivid way in “the prophetic witness of consecrated men and women, who find in the celebration of the Eucharist and in Eucharistic adoration the strength necessary for the radical following of Christ, obedient, poor and chaste.” Though they provide many services in the area of human formation and care for the poor, education and health care, consecrated men and women know that the principal purpose of their lives is “the contemplation of things divine and constant union with God in prayer.” The essential contribution that the Church expects from consecrated persons is much more in the order of being than of doing. Here I wish to reaffirm the importance of the witness of virginity, precisely in relation to the mystery of the Eucharist. In addition to its connection to priestly celibacy, the Eucharistic mystery also has an intrinsic relationship to consecrated virginity, inasmuch as the latter is an expression of the Church’s exclusive devotion to Christ, whom she accepts as her Bridegroom with a radical and fruitful fidelity. In the Eucharist, consecrated virginity finds inspiration and nourishment for its complete dedication to Christ. From the Eucharist, moreover, it draws encouragement and strength to be a sign, in our own times too, of God’s gracious and fruitful love for humanity. Finally, by its specific witness, consecrated life becomes an objective sign and foreshadowing of the “wedding feast of the Lamb” (*Rev* 19:7–9) which is the goal of all salvation history. In this sense, it points to that eschatological horizon against which the choices and life decisions of every man and woman should be situated.

*The Eucharist and moral transformation*

82. In discovering the beauty of the Eucharistic form of the Christian life, we are also led to reflect on the moral energy it provides for sustaining the authentic freedom of the children of God. Here I wish to take up a discussion that took place during the Synod about the connection between the *Eucharistic form of life and moral transformation*. Pope John Paul II stated
that the moral life “has the value of a ‘spiritual worship’ (Rom 12:1; cf. Phil 3:3), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist: by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ’s self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds”[228]. In a word, “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”[229].

This appeal to the moral value of spiritual worship should not be interpreted in a merely moralistic way. It is before all else the joy-filled discovery of love at work in the hearts of those who accept the Lord’s gift, abandon themselves to him and thus find true freedom. The moral transformation implicit in the new worship instituted by Christ is a heartfelt yearning to respond to the Lord’s love with one’s whole being, while remaining ever conscious of one’s own weakness. This is clearly reflected in the Gospel story of Zacchaeus (cf. Lk 19:1-10). After welcoming Jesus to his home, the tax collector is completely changed: he decides to give half of his possessions to the poor and to repay fourfold those whom he had defrauded. The moral urgency born of welcoming Jesus into our lives is the fruit of gratitude for having experienced the Lord’s unmerited closeness.

**Eucharistic consistency**

83. Here it is important to consider what the Synod Fathers described as Eucharistic consistency, a quality which our lives are objectively called to embody. Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others: it demands a public witness to our faith. Evidently, this is true for all the baptized, yet it is especially incumbent upon those who, by virtue of their social or political position, must make decisions regarding fundamental values, such as respect for human life, its defense from conception to natural death, the family built upon marriage between a man and a woman, the freedom to educate one’s children and the promotion of the common good in all its forms[230]. These values are not negotiable. Consequently, Catholic politicians and legislators, conscious of their grave responsibility before society, must feel
particularly bound, on the basis of a properly formed conscience, to introduce and support laws inspired by values grounded in human nature. There is an objective connection here with the Eucharist (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-29). Bishops are bound to reaffirm constantly these values as part of their responsibility to the flock entrusted to them.

The Eucharist, a mystery to be proclaimed

The Eucharist and mission

84. In my homily at the Eucharistic celebration solemnly inaugurating my Petrine ministry, I said that “there is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him.” These words are all the more significant if we think of the mystery of the Eucharist. The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God’s love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him. The Eucharist is thus the source and summit not only of the Church’s life, but also of her mission: “an authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church.” We too must be able to tell our brothers and sisters with conviction: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us” (1 Jn 1:3). Truly, nothing is more beautiful than to know Christ and to make him known to others. The institution of the Eucharist, for that matter, anticipates the very heart of Jesus’ mission: he is the one sent by the Father for the redemption of the world (cf. Jn 3:16-17; Rom 8:32). At the Last Supper, Jesus entrusts to his disciples the sacrament which makes present his self-sacrifice for the salvation of us all, in obedience to the Father’s will. We cannot approach the Eucharistic table without being drawn into the mission which, beginning in the very heart of God, is meant to reach all people. Missionary outreach is thus an essential part of the Eucharistic form of the Christian life.

The Eucharist and witness

85. The first and fundamental mission that we receive from the sacred mysteries we celebrate is that of bearing witness by our lives. The wonder we experience at the gift God has made to us in Christ gives new impulse to
our lives and commits us to becoming witnesses of his love. We become witnesses when, through our actions, words and way of being, Another makes himself present. Witness could be described as the means by which the truth of God’s love comes to men and women in history, inviting them to accept freely this radical newness. Through witness, God lays himself open, one might say, to the risk of human freedom. Jesus himself is the faithful and true witness (cf. Rev 1:5; 3:14), the one who came to testify to the truth (cf. Jn 18:37). Here I would like to reflect on a notion dear to the early Christians, which also speaks eloquently to us today: namely, witness even to the offering of one’s own life, to the point of martyrdom. Throughout the history of the Church, this has always been seen as the culmination of the new spiritual worship: “Offer your bodies” (Rom 12:1).

One thinks, for example, of the account of the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of Saint John: the entire drama is described as a liturgy, with the martyr himself becoming Eucharist.[235] We might also recall the Eucharistic imagery with which Saint Ignatius of Antioch describes his own imminent martyrdom: he sees himself as “God’s wheat” and desires to become in martyrdom “Christ’s pure bread.”[236] The Christian who offers his life in martyrdom enters into full communion with the Pasch of Jesus Christ and thus becomes Eucharist with him. Today too, the Church does not lack martyrs who offer the supreme witness to God’s love. Even if the test of martyrdom is not asked of us, we know that worship pleasing to God demands that we should be inwardly prepared for it.[237] Such worship culminates in the joyful and convincing testimony of a consistent Christian life, wherever the Lord calls us to be his witnesses.

**Christ Jesus, the one Saviour**

86. Emphasis on the intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and mission also leads to a rediscovery of the ultimate content of our proclamation. The more ardent the love for the Eucharist in the hearts of the Christian people, the more clearly will they recognize the goal of all mission: to bring Christ to others. Not just a theory or a way of life inspired by Christ, but the gift of his very person. Anyone who has not shared the truth of love with his brothers and sisters has not yet given enough. The Eucharist, as the sacrament of our salvation, inevitably reminds us of the unicity of Christ and the salvation that he won for us by his blood. The
mystery of the Eucharist, believed in and celebrated, demands a constant catechesis on the need for all to engage in a missionary effort centred on the proclamation of Jesus as the one Saviour. This will help to avoid a reductive and purely sociological understanding of the vital work of human promotion present in every authentic process of evangelization.

Freedom of worship

87. In this context, I wish to reiterate the concern expressed by the Synod Fathers about the grave difficulties affecting the mission of those Christian communities in areas where Christians are a minority or where they are denied religious freedom. We should surely give thanks to the Lord for all those Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and laity who devote themselves generously to the preaching of the Gospel and practice their faith at the risk of their lives. In not a few parts of the world, simply going to church represents a heroic witness that can result in marginalization and violence. Here too, I would like to reaffirm the solidarity of the whole Church with those who are denied freedom of worship. As we know, wherever religious freedom is lacking, people lack the most meaningful freedom of all, since it is through faith that men and women express their deepest decision about the ultimate meaning of their lives. Let us pray, therefore, for greater religious freedom in every nation, so that Christians, as well as the followers of other religions, can freely express their convictions, both as individuals and as communities.

The Eucharist, a mystery to be offered to the world

The Eucharist, bread broken for the life of the world

88. “The bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51). In these words the Lord reveals the true meaning of the gift of his life for all people. These words also reveal his deep compassion for every man and woman. The Gospels frequently speak of Jesus’ feelings towards others, especially the suffering and sinners (cf. Mt 20:34; Mk 6:34; Lk 19:41). Through a profoundly human sensibility he expresses God’s saving will for all people — that they may have true life. Each celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the gift that the crucified Lord made of his life, for us and for the whole world. In the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God’s compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The
Eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbor, which “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, affecting even 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.”[240] In all those I meet, I recognize brothers or sisters for whom the Lord gave his life, loving them “to the end” (Jn 13:1). Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become “bread that is broken” for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world. Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, we need to realize that Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally engaged: “You yourselves, give them something to eat” (Mt 14:16). Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.

The social implications of the Eucharistic mystery

89. The union with Christ brought about by the Eucharist also brings a newness to our social relations: “this sacramental ‘mysticism’ is social in character.” Indeed, “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.”[241] The relationship between the Eucharistic mystery and social commitment must be made explicit. The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled in Christ, who made of Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility which divided them (cf. Eph 2:14). Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. Mt 5:23-24).[242] In the memorial of his sacrifice, the Lord strengthens our fraternal communion and, in a particular way, urges those in conflict to hasten their reconciliation by opening themselves to dialogue and a commitment to justice. Certainly, the restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness are the conditions for building true peace.[243] The recognition of this fact leads to a
determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God’s image and likeness. Through the concrete fulfillment of this responsibility, the Eucharist becomes in life what it signifies in its celebration. As I have had occasion to say, it is not the proper task of the Church to engage in the political work of bringing about the most just society possible; nonetheless she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice. The Church “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.”[244]

In discussing the social responsibility of all Christians, the Synod Fathers noted that the sacrifice of Christ is a mystery of liberation that constantly and insistently challenges us. I therefore urge all the faithful to be true promoters of peace and justice: “All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peacemaking in our world scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation.”[245] All these problems give rise in turn to others no less troubling and disheartening. We know that there can be no superficial solutions to these issues. Precisely because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity, since Christ shed his blood for all, and at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person.

_The food of truth and human need_

90. We cannot remain passive before certain processes of globalization which not infrequently increase the gap between the rich and the poor worldwide. We must denounce those who squander the earth’s riches, provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven (cf. _Jas_ 5:4). For example, it is impossible to remain silent before the “distressing images of huge camps throughout the world of displaced persons and refugees, who are living in makeshift conditions in order to escape a worse fate, yet are still in dire need. Are these human beings not our brothers and sisters? Do their children not come into the world with the same legitimate expectations of happiness as other children?”[246] The Lord Jesus, the bread of eternal life, spurs us to be mindful of the situations of extreme poverty in which a great part of humanity still lives: these are situations for which human beings bear
a clear and disquieting responsibility. Indeed, “on the basis of available statistical data, it can be said that less than half of the huge sums spent worldwide on armaments would be more than sufficient to liberate the immense masses of the poor from destitution. This challenges humanity’s conscience. To peoples living below the poverty line, more as a result of situations to do with international political, commercial and cultural relations than as a result of circumstances beyond anyone’s control, our common commitment to truth can and must give new hope”[247].

The food of truth demands that we denounce inhumane situations in which people starve to death because of injustice and exploitation, and it gives us renewed strength and courage to work tirelessly in the service of the civilization of love. From the beginning, Christians were concerned to share their goods (cf. Acts 4:32) and to help the poor (cf. Rom 15:26). The alms collected in our liturgical assemblies are an eloquent reminder of this, and they are also necessary for meeting today’s needs. The Church’s charitable institutions, especially Caritas, carry out at various levels the important work of assisting the needy, especially the poorest. Inspired by the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity, they become a concrete expression of that charity; they are to be praised and encouraged for their commitment to solidarity in our world.

The Church’s social teaching

91. The mystery of the Eucharist inspires and impels us to work courageously within our world to bring about that renewal of relationships which has its inexhaustible source in God’s gift. The prayer which we repeat at every Mass: “Give us this day our daily bread,” obliges us to do everything possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions, to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in developing countries. In a particular way, the Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through practical education in charity and justice. To this end, the Synod considered it necessary for Dioceses and Christian communities to teach and promote the Church’s social doctrine.[248] In this precious legacy handed down from the earliest ecclesial tradition, we find elements of great
wisdom that guide Christians in their involvement in today’s burning social issues. This teaching, the fruit of the Church’s whole history, is distinguished by realism and moderation; it can help to avoid misguided compromises or false utopias.

The sanctification of the world and the protection of creation

92. Finally, to develop a profound Eucharistic spirituality that is also capable of significantly affecting the fabric of society, the Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that they do so in the name of all creation, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end. The Eucharist itself powerfully illuminates human history and the whole cosmos. In this sacramental perspective we learn, day by day, that every ecclesial event is a kind of sign by which God makes himself known and challenges us. The Eucharistic form of life can thus help foster a real change in the way we approach history and the world. The liturgy itself teaches us this, when, during the presentation of the gifts, the priest raises to God a prayer of blessing and petition over the bread and wine, “fruit of the earth,” “fruit of the vine” and “work of human hands.” With these words, the rite not only includes in our offering to God all human efforts and activity, but also leads us to see the world as God’s creation, which brings forth everything we need for our sustenance. The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God’s good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:4-12). The justified concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world is reinforced by Christian hope, which commits us to working responsibly for the protection of creation. The relationship between the Eucharist and the cosmos helps us to see the unity of God’s plan and to grasp the profound relationship between creation and the “new creation” inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, the new Adam. Even now we take part in that new creation by virtue of our Baptism (cf. Col 2:12ff.). Our Christian life, nourished by the Eucharist, gives us a glimpse of that new world — new heavens and a new earth — where the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, from God, “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2).
The usefulness of a Eucharistic Compendium

93. At the conclusion of these reflections, in which I have taken up a number of themes raised at the Synod, I also wish to accept the proposal which the Synod Fathers advanced as a means of helping the Christian people to believe, celebrate and live ever more fully the mystery of the Eucharist. The competent offices of the Roman Curia will publish a Compendium which will assemble texts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, prayers, explanations of the Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Missal and other useful aids for a correct understanding, celebration and adoration of the Sacrament of the Altar. It is my hope that this book will help make the memorial of the Passover of the Lord increasingly the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission. This will encourage each member of the faithful to make his or her life a true act of spiritual worship.

CONCLUSION

94. Dear brothers and sisters, the Eucharist is at the root of every form of holiness, and each of us is called to the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. How many saints have advanced along the way of perfection thanks to their Eucharistic devotion! From Saint Ignatius of Antioch to Saint Augustine, from Saint Anthony Abbot to Saint Benedict, from Saint Francis of Assisi to Saint Thomas Aquinas, from Saint Clare of Assisi to Saint Catherine of Siena, from Saint Paschal Baylon to Saint Peter Julian Eymard, from Saint Alphonsus Liguori to Blessed Charles de Foucauld, from Saint John Mary Vianney to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, from Saint Pius of Pietrelcina to Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, from Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati to Blessed Ivan Merz, to name only a few, holiness has always found its centre in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

This most holy mystery thus needs to be firmly believed, devoutly celebrated and intensely lived in the Church. Jesus’ gift of himself in the sacrament which is the memorial of his passion tells us that the success of our lives is found in our participation in the Trinitarian life offered to us truly and definitively in him. The celebration and worship of the Eucharist enable us to draw near to God’s love and to persevere in that love until we are united with the Lord whom we love. The offering of our lives, our
fellowship with the whole community of believers and our solidarity with all men and women are essential aspects of that *logiké latreía*, spiritual worship, holy and pleasing to God (cf. *Rom* 12:1), which transforms every aspect of our human existence, to the glory of God. I therefore ask all pastors to spare no effort in promoting an authentically Eucharistic Christian spirituality. Priests, deacons and all those who carry out a Eucharistic ministry should always be able to find in this service, exercised with care and constant preparation, the strength and inspiration needed for their personal and communal path of sanctification. I exhort the lay faithful, and families in particular, to find ever anew in the sacrament of Christ’s love the energy needed to make their lives an authentic sign of the presence of the risen Lord. I ask all consecrated men and women to show by their Eucharistic lives the splendor and the beauty of belonging totally to the Lord.

95. At the beginning of the fourth century, Christian worship was still forbidden by the imperial authorities. Some Christians in North Africa, who felt bound to celebrate the Lord’s Day, defied the prohibition. They were martyred after declaring that it was not possible for them to live without the Eucharist, the food of the Lord: *sine dominico non possumus*. May these martyrs of Abitinae, in union with all those saints and beati who made the Eucharist the centre of their lives, intercede for us and teach us to be faithful to our encounter with the risen Christ. We too cannot live without partaking of the sacrament of our salvation; we too desire to be *iuxta dominicam viventes*, to reflect in our lives what we celebrate on the Lord’s Day. That day is the day of our definitive deliverance. Is it surprising, then, that we should wish to live every day in that newness of life which Christ has brought us in the mystery of the Eucharist?

96. May Mary Most Holy, the Immaculate Virgin, ark of the new and eternal covenant, accompany us on our way to meet the Lord who comes. In her we find realized most perfectly the essence of the Church. The Church sees in Mary — “Woman of the Eucharist,” as she was called by the Servant of God John Paul II — her finest icon, and she contemplates Mary as a singular model of the Eucharistic life. For this reason, as the priest prepares to receive on the altar the verum Corpus natum de Maria Virgine, speaking on behalf of the liturgical assembly, he says in the words
of the canon: “We honor Mary, the ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God”\textsuperscript{[254]}. Her holy name is also invoked and venerated in the canons of the Eastern Christian traditions. The faithful, for their part, “commend to Mary, Mother of the Church, their lives and the work of their hands. Striving to have the same sentiments as Mary, they help the whole community to become a living offering pleasing to the Father”\textsuperscript{[255]}. She is the \textit{tota pulchra}, the all-beautiful, for in her the radiance of God’s glory shines forth. The beauty of the heavenly liturgy, which must be reflected in our own assemblies, is faithfully mirrored in her. From Mary we must learn to become men and women of the Eucharist and of the Church, and thus to present ourselves, in the words of Saint Paul, “holy and blameless” before the Lord, even as he wished us to be from the beginning (cf. \textit{Col} 1:22; \textit{Eph} 1:4)\textsuperscript{[256]}.

97. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may the Holy Spirit kindle within us the same ardor experienced by the disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. \textit{Lk} 24:13-35) and renew our “Eucharistic wonder” through the splendor and beauty radiating from the liturgical rite, the efficacious sign of the infinite beauty of the holy mystery of God. Those disciples arose and returned in haste to Jerusalem in order to share their joy with their brothers and sisters in the faith. True joy is found in recognizing that the Lord is still with us, our faithful companion along the way. The Eucharist makes us discover that Christ, risen from the dead, is our contemporary in the mystery of the Church, his body. Of this mystery of love we have become witnesses. Let us encourage one another to walk joyfully, our hearts filled with wonder, towards our encounter with the Holy Eucharist, so that we may experience and proclaim to others the truth of the words with which Jesus took leave of his disciples: “Lo, I am with you always, until the end of the world” (\textit{Mt} 28:20).

\textit{Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 22 February, the Feast of the Chair of Peter, in the year 2007, the second of my Pontificate.}

\textbf{BENEDICTUS PP. XVI}

\footnote{[1]} Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} III, q. 73, a. 3.

\footnote{[2]} Saint Augustine, \textit{In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus}, 26,5: PL 35, 1609.


Cf. *Proposito 2*.

I am referring here to the need for a hermeneutic of continuity also with regard to the correct interpretation of the liturgical development which followed the Second Vatican Council: cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia (22 December 2005): *AAS* 98 (2006), 44-45.

Cf. *AAS* 97 (2005), 337-352.


Cf. *Proposito 1*.


*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1327.


[27] Ibid., III, 4: PG 48, 642.

[28] Propositio 22.

[29] Cf. Propositio 42: "This eucharistic encounter takes place in the Holy Spirit, who transforms and sanctifies us. He re-awakens in the disciple the firm desire to proclaim boldly to others all that he has heard and experienced, to bring them to the same encounter with Christ. Thus the disciple, sent forth by the Church, becomes open to a mission without frontiers."


[34] Cf. *Proposito 5*.


[39] *Proposito 5*: "The term 'catholic' expresses the universality deriving from the unity that the Eucharist, celebrated in each Church, fosters and builds up. The particular Churches in the universal Church thus have, in the Eucharist, the duty to make visible their own unity and diversity. This bond of fraternal love allows the trinitarian communion to become apparent. The Councils and Synods express in history this fraternal aspect of the Church."

[40] Cf. *ibid*

[41] Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.


Cf. *ibid.*, 11; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 9, 13.


For example, the Confiteor, or the words of the priest and people before receiving Communion: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed." Not insignificantly does the liturgy also prescribe certain very beautiful prayers for the priest, handed down by tradition, which speak of the need for forgiveness, as, for example, the one recited quietly before inviting the faithful to sacramental communion: "By the mystery of your body and blood, free me from all my sins and from every evil. Keep me always faithful to your teachings and never let me be parted from you."


Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic


[62] Together with the Synod Fathers I wish to note that the non-sacramental penitential services mentioned in the ritual of the sacrament of Reconciliation can be helpful for increasing the spirit of conversion and of communion in Christian communities, thereby preparing hearts for the celebration of the sacrament: cf. *Proposito 7*.


[76] Cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 16.


[85] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1617.


[97] Cf. *ibid*.

[98] Cf. *ibid*.


[101] Here I would recall the words filled with hope and consolation found in Eucharistic Prayer II: "Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again. Bring them and all the
departed into the light of your presence."


\[103\] Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

\[104\] *Proposito* 4.


\[109\] *Proposito* 33.

\[110\] *Sermo* 227, 1: PL 38, 1099.

\[111\] *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 21, 8: PL 35, 1568.

\[112\] Ibid., 28, 1: PL 35, 1622.

\[113\] Cf. *Proposito* 30. Weekday Masses, which the faithful are encouraged to attend, find their proper form on the day of the Lord, the day of Christ's resurrection; *Proposito* 43.

\[114\] Cf. *Proposito* 2.

\[115\] Cf. *Proposito* 25.

\[116\] Cf. *Proposito* 19. *Proposito* 25 states: "An authentic liturgical action expresses the sacredness of the eucharistic mystery. This should be evident from the words and actions of the priest who celebrates, as he intercedes to God the Father both with the faithful and on their behalf."

\[117\] General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 22; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum*

[118] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church Christus Dominus, 14; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, 41.


[120] Cf. ibid.


[124] Cf. ibid.

[125] In these matters the provisions of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 319-351, are to be faithfully observed.


[128] Cf. Propositio 25: "Like every artistic expression, singing must be closely adapted to the liturgy and contribute effectively to its aim; in other words, it must express faith, prayer, wonder and love of Jesus present in the Eucharist."


Concilium, 56; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction Eucharisticum Mysterium (25 May 1967), 3: AAS 57 (1967), 540-543.


[134] Ibid.


[143] To this end the Synod has called for the preparation of pastoral aids based on the three-year lectionary, to help connect the proclamation of the readings with the doctrine of the faith; cf. Propositio 19.


[146] Cf. ibid., 78-79.


[149] Ibid., 79c.
Taking into account ancient and venerable customs and the wishes expressed by the Synod Fathers, I have asked the competent curial offices to study the possibility of moving the sign of peace to another place, such as before the presentation of the gifts at the altar. To do so would also serve as a significant reminder of the Lord’s insistence that we be reconciled with others before offering our gifts to God (cf. Mt 5:23 ff.); cf. Propositio 23.


Cf. Propositio 34.

Cf. Propositio 35.


No. 48.

Ibid.


Cf. Propositio 33.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 92.

Cf. ibid., 94.

ministries must be introduced in accordance with a specific mandate and in accordance with the real needs of the celebrating community. Those entrusted with these liturgical services must be chosen with care, well prepared, and provided with ongoing formation. Their appointment must be for a limited term. They must be known to the community and be gratefully acknowledged by the community."


[171] See, for example, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, III, q. LXXX, a. 1, 2; Saint Teresa of Jesus, The Way of Perfection, Chapter 35. The doctrine was authoritatively confirmed by the Council of Trent, Session XIII, c. VIII.


Cf. Nos. 1398-1401.

Cf. No. 293.


Cf. *Proposito* 44.


Candidates for the priesthood can be introduced to these traditions as part of their seminary training: cf. *Proposito* 45.

Cf. *Proposito* 37.


*Proposito* 36.

Cf. ibid.

Cf. *Proposito* 32.


*Proposito* 19.


Cf. *Proposito* 34.


Cf. No. 314.

VII, 10, 16: PL 32, 742.


*De Civitate Dei*, X, 6: PL 41, 284.


*Ad Magnes.*, 9, 1: PG 5, 670.

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 258, rightly notes in this regard: "For man, bound as he is to the necessity of work, this rest opens to the prospect of a fuller freedom, that of the eternal Sabbath (cf. Heb 4:9-10). Rest gives men and women the possibility to remember and experience anew God's work, from Creation to Redemption, to recognize themselves as his work (cf. Eph 2:10), and to give thanks for their lives and for their subsistence to him who is their author."

Cf. Propositio 30.

Cf. Propositio 30.


Cf. Propositio 30.

Cf. ibid.

Cf. ibid.


No. 10: AAS 71 (1979), 414-415.


Propositio 39.


Cf. Propositio 39.

Cf. ibid.

The Roman Pontifical, Rites of Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests and of Deacons, Ordination of a Priest, No. 163.

(224) *Proposito* 38.


Code of Canon Law, can. 663 § 1.


Cf. *Proposito* 46.

*AAS* 97 (2005), 711.

*Proposito* 42.


Cf. *Proposito* 42.
During the Synod sessions we heard very moving and significant testimonies about the effectiveness of the Eucharist in peacemaking. In this regard, Propositio 49 states that: "Thanks to eucharistic celebrations, peoples engaged in conflict have been able to gather around the word of God, hear his prophetic message of reconciliation through gratuitous forgiveness, and receive the grace of conversion which allows them to share in the same bread and cup."


Propositio 48.


Cf. Propositio 48. In this regard, the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church has proved most helpful.

Cf. Propositio 43.

Cf. Propositio 47.

Cf. Propositio 17.

Martyrium Saturnini, Dativi et aliorum plurimorum, 7, 9, 10: PL 8, 707, 709-710.


Eucharistic Prayer I (Roman Canon).

Propositio 50.

PRELATE

• New Circumscriptions
• Appointments
• Activities of the Prelate
• Pastoral Letters
• Homilies
• Articles and Interviews
New Circumscriptions

New circumscriptions

On April 19, 2007, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, established that—regarding the geographical division of the Prelature's circumscriptions—the territory of the Autonomous Community of La Rioja, Spain would now be dependent on the Delegation of Saragossa in place of Pamplona, by the following decree:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA

Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia

Prælatus Sanctæ Crucis et Operis Dei

DECRETUM

Quo aptius provideatur curæ laboris apostolici Prælaturæ in territorio La Rioja in Hispanica Regione, perspecto n. 153 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei, auditis Consilio Generali atque Assessoratu Centrali necnon Vicario Regionali Hispaniæ et Vicariis Delegationum quarum interest, hoc præsenti decreto

STATUIMUS

ut territorium Communitatis Autonomæ La Rioja separetur a Delegatione Pampelonensi et pertineat posthac ad circumscriptionem Delegationis sedem habentis Cæsaraugustæ.

Datum Romæ, ex Aedibus Curiæ Prælatitiae, die 19 mensis aprilis, anno 2007.

+ Xaverius Echevarría

Franciscus Vives

Curiæ Prælatitiae Cancellarius

Reg. Gen. R. Lib. VI pag. 26

On May 25, 2007, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, erected the
Delegation of Russia, by the following decree:
Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
DECRETUM
Perspecto n. 152, §2 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei.
Auditis Consilio Generali et Assessoratu Centrali, Prælaturæ Delegationem Russiæ a me dependentem erigo atque erectam declaro.
Datum Romæ, ex Aedibus Curæ Prælatitiae, die 25, mense maio, anno 2007.
+ Xaverius Echevarría
Franciscus Vives
Curæ Prælatitiae Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. Lib. VI pag. 26

Appointments

Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Delegation of Congo
Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia Prælatus
DECRETUM
Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Franciscum Xaverium Valdés de Elizalde, ad quinquennium nominamus atque
constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegatione Congi, cum omnibus et
singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad
suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem
in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Aedibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 21, mense iunio, anno
2007.

+ Xaverius Echevarría
Franciscus Vives Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 26

Decree of appointment of the Vicar of the Delegation of Russia

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis
gratia Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Iosephum
Antonium Senovilla García, ad quinquennium nominamus atque
constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegatione Russiæ, cum omnibus et
singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad
suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem
in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Aedibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 29, mense maio, anno
2007.

+ Xaverius Echevarría
Franciscus Vives Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 26

To read the full version of Romana, you can subscribe to the print
edition.

Back to Contents
Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral Trips

During the first half of 2007, the Prelate made five brief trips, often taking advantage of weekends, to the following cities in Europe: Brussels, Paris, Milan, Berlin, and Stockholm. During these trips filled with intense prayer he met with faithful of the Prelature and with many other people who benefit from the apostolic work of Opus Dei.

He was in Brussels from March 2 to 4. While there he blessed a statue of our Lady in the new shrine at the Dongelberg Conference Center, the buildings of a school being started by parents who belong to Opus Dei and their friends, and the new building of the Arenberg Student Residence in Louvain.

Two weeks later, from March 16 to 18, he was in Paris. On Saturday the 17th, he went to the rue du Bac to pray before a statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. At six in the evening, at the Garnelles university residence, he met with Supernumeraries from Paris and other cities. At the beginning of the get-together, he told them: “You need to bring to the furthest corners of this country the marvelous news that God has saved the world. Be apostolic. You should consider every day—every day!—what apostolate have you done: in your families, by your example, loving your wives very much, loving your children a lot, teaching them by your conduct. In your workplace: how much you have prayed for your colleagues, for your clients....” Later, when an airline pilot related a personal experience with a fellow worker, he insisted on the need to be constant in spreading the faith: “Don’t get tired when people say, no, no, no... The oui is the answer we have to be seeking.”

On the following day, Sunday the 18th, he celebrated Mass at the Regional Commission, on the rue Dufrénoy. Afterwards he congratulated Msgr. Maycas, who helped begin the apostolic work of Opus Dei in France, on his 85th birthday. Before returning to Rome he met once more with faithful of the Prelature. “The Church is alive! The Church is young! The Church is Christ’s—not was, but is! It is ever relevant and timely!
Therefore, our faith in God must be a faith that fills us with enthusiasm,” he said to a group of lay people and priests, making use of some words of Pope Benedict XVI.

Between April 11 and 14 he was in Milan. Owing to prior commitments, the Archbishop, Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, was unable to meet with him, but he extended the Prelate a warm welcome by phone and assured him of his prayers for the fruit of the trip.

Large groups of the Prelature’s faithful of quite varied ages and backgrounds had an opportunity to meet with Bishop Echevarría during these days. They came not only from Milan and other cities of Lombardy, but also from Turin, Genoa and Verona, among other places. The Prelate insisted on the need to be exemplary in one’s Christian life, in receiving the sacraments, and in one’s apostolic efforts, especially in each one’s family environment.

Before returning to Rome he went to the cathedral, where he greeted the image of our Lady, patroness of Milan, and prayed before the tomb of Blessed Ildefonso Schuster.

In his first visit as Prelate to Berlin, Bishop Echevarría stayed at Feldmark, a Center of the Prelature.

He arrived on April 27 and celebrated Mass for women of the Prelature in Sconenberch, another Center in the German capital. Afterwards he went to the cathedral, where he prayed before the tomb of Cardinal Bengsch and that of a priest who was martyred by the Nazis. Later he made reference to this priest when speaking about the need for courage in the apostolate.

During these days, people from Berlin, Hannover, Kiel, Hamburg, Muenster and Cologne met with him. He also met with families, some of them with numerous children. In Munich, where his plane made a stopover, he was able to greet Bavarian faithful of the Prelature. On Saturday evening, in a gathering with Supernumeraries, he greeted a young man from Montenegro whom he encouraged to pray for peace in the Balkans and for the future activity of the Work in his country.

On various occasions he recommended the use of the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. He also urged them to encourage
Protestants and non-believers to read it, although, he added, what is most helpful is the example of one's own life: living with temperance in an environment of material abundance, avoiding excessive comfort, seeking expiation in the little things of each day.

On Sunday the 29th, before leaving, he consecrated the altar of Feldmark’s oratory. Some Cooperators were invited to the ceremony, including the architect who had overseen the renovation project and an artist who had worked on the decoration. Referring to the various parts of the ceremony the Prelate reminded them that a Catholic should be an altar of God. Each one has been anointed with holy Chrism twice, at Baptism and Confirmation (three times in the case of priests). And each should renew in his life the sacrifice of Christ, who gave himself up for his brethren.

From May 18 to 20 the Prelate was in Stockholm, where he met not only with faithful of Opus Dei, but also with young people taking part in formational activities of the Prelature. A student from Gothenburg who was received into the Catholic Church a few years ago, asked him when Opus Dei would go to his city. “When people like you decide to do Opus Dei in Gothenburg,” answered the Prelate. “Because with the spirit of Opus Dei you can already begin to speak with your friends.... I am relying on you, and I tell you what St. Josemaría used to say: I am putting Opus Dei in your hands.”

A student living in the Lårkstaden university residence who also was received into the Church recently and who said he was concerned about Sweden recovering its Catholic roots, was told by the Prelate that from his beginning of the trip he had been praying that “Sweden, all of Sweden, may return to being Catholic.” After the get-together ended, another resident of Lårkstaden, the only non-Catholic living there, expressed interest in receiving instruction as a Catholic.

During his stay in Stockholm, the Prelate mentioned a number of times the impression made on him by a letter he received from a woman who had converted a few years ago. In it she told him that in Sweden, under the apparent indifference of the majority, there were many souls who wanted to get close to God in their daily life.
Publication of the book: Por Cristo, con El, y en El

The publisher Palabra, in its collection of “Studies,” has published the book Por Cristo, con Él y en Él (Through Christ, with Him and in Him). It contains, in chronological order, eight writings of Bishop Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, that refer to St. Josemaría.

Four of these deal specifically with the priesthood in the life and teachings of the founder of Opus Dei. The others are centered on various aspects of the call to sanctity that all the faithful in the Church have received.

In these pages Bishop Echevarría sets before the reader the example of the life and teachings of this deeply-loved saint, with the desire that many people will be moved to strive with generosity for the goal of personal sanctity.

Pastoral Letters

Letter of January 2007

My dear Children: May Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

During the Christmas season, the Church reminds us on several occasions that at the most important moment in history, when God-made-man came into the world, a song of joy resounded in the heavens: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will" (Lk 2:14). The angels’ hymn shows us that the glory of God and peace on earth are closely
united realities. In calling us to share in his intimate life, God has incorporated us to the infinite communion of love that exists in the heart of the Trinity. God the Father sent his Son into the world; and later the Father and the Son sent us the Holy Spirit. Since then, and right to the end of time, he pours out through the Church, God’s family on earth, his love, joy and peace.

Today, the first day of January, is the World Day of Peace. It is a very good day to beseech our Lord to infuse this celestial gift into every heart and into society. As the Holy Father reminded us at the beginning of Advent, “peace is the goal to which the whole of humanity aspires! For believers ‘Peace’ is one of the most beautiful names of God, who wants all his children to agree with one another” (Homily, December 2, 2006).

Christ came to tear down the wall separating Jews and Gentiles, making of the two a new people (Cf. Eph 2:14-17) that would serve God in justice and holiness. He came to instill peace, “not only between Jews and non-Jews, but between all nations, since all have their origin in the same God, the one Creator and Lord of the universe” (Benedict XVI, Homily in Ephesus, November 29, 2006).

In this regard, the pontifical message for the World Day of Peace has a very significant title this year: “The Human Person, the Heart of Peace.” The Pope wants to emphasize that efforts to promote peace in the world, always laudable, end up being ineffective or transitory if a true concern to respect the dignity of all men and women is lacking. “I am convinced,” he wrote, “that respect for the person promotes peace and that, in building peace, the foundations are laid for an authentic integral humanism. In this way a serene future is prepared for coming generations” (Message for the World Day of Peace 2007).

The Pope reminds us of the many consequences that stem from this important principle: the right to life and religious freedom; the natural equality of all human beings, reflected in the safe-guarding of human rights; the need to foster harmony and understanding among people of different religions, cultures, and races. As an indispensable premise, he points out that true peace is a gift of God and a task conferred upon mankind. In so far as it is a divine gift, it was promised to mankind from ancient times; but only with the birth of Christ was it sent to earth.
"Ecce pax non promissa, sed missa," writes Saint Bernard. “Now our peace is not promised but sent; it is not deferred but granted; not prophesied but achieved. It is as if God the Father sent upon the earth a sackful of his mercy, which will burst open during our Lord’s passion to pour forth its hidden contents—the price of our redemption. It was only a small sack, but it was very full. As Scripture tells us: ‘a child has been given to us,’ but in him ‘ dwells all the fullness of the divine nature’” (Sermon 1 on the Epiphany of the Lord). Let us thank God for his infinite mercy, also in the name of those who have not recognized it. And let us feel the need to love all human beings; let us call to mind more frequently St. Josemaría, to whom the world seemed so small.

At the same time, peace implies a task entrusted to men of good will; a good will that stems from the love that God has for us. Thus, as you know, one can translate the angels’ song more literally: “and peace on earth to men who love God.” The task of fostering peace is not only in the hands of those who have direct responsibility for public affairs; it is also in the hands of all citizens without exception, in accord with each one’s possibilities. Let us carry out each day this joyful task of striving to be “sowers of peace and joy,” as St. Josemaría liked to say, in the various spheres of our life. Are we spreading peace to souls? Can they say that we love them? How much are we praying for those who are suffering?

The first field in which we have to cultivate peace is our own soul, where this divine gift should reign so that we can then transmit it to others. From man’s heart comes evil; but with God’s grace there also come the good things that man is capable of. “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Lk 6:45). As Benedict XVI says: “Grace is the power that transforms man and the world; peace is the mature fruit of this transformation” (Homily in Ephesus, November 29, 2006). But this requires the free collaboration of the human person in the divine plan of salvation. And since the cause of conflicts resides fundamentally in the heart, each person needs to struggle decisively within himself, to make firm the reign of God in his own soul.
This is a truth as old as the Gospel, although unfortunately many don’t know it or don’t put it into practice. Our Lord said: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt 10:34). He spoke of the struggle against sin, an indispensable prerequisite for true peace.

When one truly strives to uproot the weeds of sin and to identify oneself with Christ, a Christian’s life is converted into good soil, where the virtues germinate that make possible the harmonious coexistence, imbued with charity and peace, of people from the most varied environments. As Benedict XVI said, “alongside the ecology of nature, there exists what can be called a ‘human’ ecology, which in turn demands a ‘social’ ecology.” And he adds: “there is an urgent need...for a commitment to a human ecology that can favor the growth of the ‘tree of peace’” (Message for the World Day of Peace 2007).

Let us spread everywhere these longings of the Holy Father. And at the same time, with a big heart, let us ask our Lord for forgiveness and make reparation for the sins with which we offend him, and also for those who offend him in many parts of the world by the promotion of behavior contrary to the natural law, and therefore to human dignity.

With the new year, we celebrate Mary’s divine maternity, the root of all the graces God has granted to our Mother. Let us go to her intercession filled with trust, placing in her hands our personal struggle for sanctity and our prayer for peace. Our Lady, Regina Pacis, will obtain from Jesus, “the Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6), this divine gift so longed for by souls, the Church, and the whole world.

With all affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Pamplona, January 1, 2007
Letter of May 2007

My dear Children: May Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

Throughout the Easter season, the readings at Mass present us with scenes taken from the Acts of the Apostles. It is a source of great joy to see how from the beginning, right from the day of Pentecost, the first faithful had the clear awareness of constituting the new family of God on earth, founded on Christ’s paschal sacrifice and on the effusion of the Holy Spirit. Let us be filled with joy and responsibility, since we, each one of us, are the Church, which is ever young.

St. Luke tells us that those first brothers and sisters of ours in the faith “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). And, he adds: “the company of those that believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32).

An immediate consequence of knowing and feeling themselves to be God’s family was apostolic daring, the courage to speak about Jesus to the persons they met, without fear or human respects. “They spoke the word of God with boldness,” notes the evangelist. And he emphasizes: “with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:31, 33).

Underlying this marvelous picture, which highlights the first Christians’ logical enthusiasm for the risen Jesus and their apostolic zeal, one can make out, as I already said, the awareness of being God’s family on earth. It is the family, united by bonds much stronger than those of blood, that our Lord had proclaimed in his preaching: “Here are my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister, and mother” (Mt 12:49-50).

Jesus’ words refer first of all to our Lady, for thanks to Mary’s full adherence to what the Archangel had announced to her on God’s behalf, the great mystery of the incarnation of the Word took place. The first Christians learned from our Lady to conduct themselves as God’s children, as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.
Some Fathers of the Church emphasize Mary’s indispensable role as Mother in the early Church, after Jesus’ ascension to heaven and the coming of the Paraclete. For example, in a book attributed to St. Maximus the Confessor, we read that “when the apostles dispersed throughout the whole world, the holy Mother of Christ, as Queen of all mankind, dwelt at the center of the world, in Jerusalem, in Sion, with the beloved apostle whom Christ the Lord had given to her as her son” (*Life of Mary* attributed to St. Maxius the Confessor, no. 95: *Testi mariani del primo millennio*, vol. II, p. 259).

These considerations are very timely for the month of May, especially dedicated, in a great part of the world, to our Lady. Fulfilling the mission her Son entrusted to her on the Cross, Mary conducts herself at every moment as the Mother of Christians, as the Mother of the Church. I invite you to consider St. Josemaría’s joy when, at the beginning of this month, he points out that “devotion to our Lady...is always alive, awakening in Christians a supernatural desire to act as *domestici Dei*, as members of God’s household (*Eph* 2:19)” (*St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By*, no. 139).

I would dare to say that St. Josemaría was an innovator or, if you prefer, a saint who drew out immense riches and insights from Sacred Scripture. He used to stress that a Christian—and specifically, a man or woman of Opus Dei—makes the street into a temple, by turning one’s occupations into worship and praise of the Blessed Trinity. And I find in those words of the homily I just cited something very characteristic of him, which many people have commented on: in his human dealings and conversations, St. Josemaría converted the many different places where he happened to be into another Bethany. When with the sick, with manual workers, with students, with intellectuals, etc. (and I could point to many specific cases), he created a family atmosphere, teaching everyone how to receive Christ, as did Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

It is only natural that each one, in light of his or her particular needs, should make a specific plan for ways to deal personally with our Lady in the upcoming weeks, with the desire to see those around us as brothers and sisters, at every moment. Perhaps we can put more attention and affection into our daily praying of the Rosary and the contemplation of the mysteries; or undertake a pilgrimage, accompanied perhaps by another person, to a
shrine or chapel dedicated to our Lady in the city where we live or in the surrounding area.

In Opus Dei during this month we live the custom of the “May pilgrimage,” begun by our founder in 1935. Let us entrust its spiritual fruit into our Mother’s hands. For as St. Josemaría said, “Mary continually builds the Church and keeps it together. It is difficult to have devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the Mystical Body and more united to its visible head, the Pope” (Ibid.).

The consideration of the Church as God’s family also brings to mind the need to spread the truth about the family, founded on the marriage “of one man and one woman, forever.” As the Pope said in Valencia a little less than a year ago, “the family is the privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love.” (Benedict XVI, Address at the World Congress of Families, July 8, 2006). We can never do enough to spread the Church’s teaching on this point, when in many countries people are undermining, by means of unjust laws and customs, the natural foundations of the family. A few weeks back, I had the joy of meeting in Rome with a large group of married couples who were taking part in an International Conference on the Family. Following the teachings of the Church’s Magisterium, I encouraged them to continue strengthening, by their words and their lives, the roots of the institution of the family, which is “a necessary good for peoples, an indispensable foundation for society and a great and lifelong treasure for couples” (Ibid.).

The family is rightfully called the domestic church, “because the family manifests and lives out the communal and familial nature of the Church as the family of God. Each family member, in accord with their own role, exercises the baptismal priesthood and contributes toward making the family a community of grace and of prayer, a school of human and Christian virtue and the place where the faith is first proclaimed to children” (Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 350).

An essential characteristic of this institution, as a community founded and built on love—a disinterested self-giving to others—is that its members are called to spend themselves daily in an effective and affectionate concern for one another. No one there can act as if the others did not exist; each has to be concerned about the needs of the others: praying for one another,
helping one another, suffering and rejoicing over the sorrows and joys of
the others. Thus all will contribute to carrying out the most sweet precept,
which brings with it Christian fraternity, a sowing of peace and joy that
necessarily ends up influencing society.

The duty to “build up the family” in each home is something very
pleasing, which falls on everyone: the father and mother, the brothers and
sisters, the grandparents, anyone who contributes with their work to the
care of the home. It is a task that affects everyone, because all of us have to
fight against a “spoiled child” mentality, a clear manifestation of self-
centeredness. Logically, this duty especially binds the parents, who have to
direct their entire life, before other noble goals, to modeling their own
family, as perfectly as possible, on the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and
Joseph. Although some disagreements will inevitably occur, Christian
spouses have to make an effort to overcome them quickly, asking for and
granting forgiveness.

St. Josemaría understood and excused those weaknesses: “since we are
human beings, sometimes it’s okay to argue; but not a lot. And afterwards,
both of you have to recognize that you are at fault, and tell each other,
“Forgive me!” And give each other a big hug, and then, keep going! But
make it clear that you are not going to have any more fights for a long time.
And never argue in front of the children, whether they are young or older.
Even when very small, children notice everything” (St. Josemaría, Notes
taken in a get-together, June 4, 1974).

This marvelous panorama, daughters and sons of mine who are living
your divine vocation within marriage, is also seen in sacrifices that are
generally small, although at times they may seem great to you. The
responsibility of bringing forward the home falls integrally on the father
and mother, in every area. Perhaps one of the spouses, because of work
demands, spends most of their time outside the home; but on returning
home, after a day of hard, and even exhausting, work, one cannot dispense
oneself from striving to make the life of the other family members pleasant,
or dedicate oneself to thinking selfishly about one’s own relaxation. You
have to give your spouse the affection and attention to which they have a
right, and your children—especially in crucial periods of their physical and
emotional development—the time and affection that they need.
Therefore, my daughters and sons who are married, examine your behavior at home. Think about how you can help out more in the tasks at home (which also fall to the men). Consider whether you speak calmly amongst yourselves about each of your children, so as to guide them by common agreement, and whether you are ready, when necessary, to cut back in your activity outside the home, in order to take better care of your family, which is always, as St. Josemaría insisted, the “best business.” Especially, when the children are very young, help the other spouse to fulfill their Christian duties, such as attending Holy Mass or the means of Christian formation. Seek out the opportune means, certain that your effort and sacrifice will redound to the good of the whole family.

In the preceding paragraphs I have spoken more specifically to married people, but I want to stress that these duties and the main points of these counsels can apply to everyone, for we are all responsible—each in his or her own personal circumstances—for creating and maintaining around us a true family atmosphere. How do you pour yourself out for the others? What interest do you show in bringing peace and joy to the others? How do you show your availability for whatever needs to be done at home? At the office, in the workshop, during moments of relaxation, how do you foster fraternity, the environment of a home?

As I write these lines, I am also thinking in a very special way of the Administration of our Centers. Precisely because you carry out work very similar to that of our Lady in the home of Nazareth, how greatly you can influence, my daughters, the good of each person, each Center, each apostolic endeavor, the entire Work, all of society, by your hidden and silent service that creates the savor of a Christian family!

With regard to this marvelous family that is the Work, I have given thanks to God for two recent experiences. Fifteen days ago in Milan; and the day before yesterday when I returned from Berlin. These two stays brought to mind many recollections of the life of St. Josemaría, who wants each and every one of us to “build up the family” at every moment.

Let us go frequently to the Mother of the Church and the Work, asking her to teach us to spread the ideals of the Christian family everywhere, with its various practical, and necessary, consequences. If this
should ever entail sacrifice, let us not forget that it is also an inexhaustible source of joy: the joy of those who don’t think about themselves but who give themselves in generous dedication to the others, for God, as Jesus did.

Continue to pray a lot for my intentions. God willed that I be the Father of this supernatural family of the Work. I, alone, cannot do anything; supported by my daughters and sons, with God’s grace, I can do everything: “omnia possum in eo, qui me confortat.” (Phil 4:13).

And pray more, much more, for Benedict XVI, the common Father of Catholics, the Vicar of Christ in this great family of God on earth, which the Holy Church is.

With all affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2007

Homilies

On the Feast of St. Josemaría, St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome (June 26, 2007)

On the feast of St. Josemaria in

St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome

My dear brothers and sisters!

1. Almost five years have gone by since the canonization of St. Josemaría, and the impact of his example and teachings continues to spread all over the world. His reputation for holiness continues to reach new
places, bringing thousands of people the desire to seek and converse with God amid the circumstances of their daily life.

My heart is filled today with a great joy that I would like to share with you. Today, on the feast of St. Josemaría, the stable apostolic work of faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei has begun in Russia, in that land stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, from the Black Sea to the ice-bound Arctic. Thus one of St. Josemaría’s dreams has become a reality. He always longed to see the spirit of Opus Dei spread to the whole world, and therefore also to the nations of Eastern Europe. You can’t imagine how much he looked forward to this moment!

Thanks be to God, the Prelature’s faithful are now working in these countries and in so many others. But for many years, the realization of this dream was blocked by the lack of freedom there. In 1955, during a trip to Vienna, St. Josemaría entrusted this intention to the intercession of the Mother of God, invoking her assistance with the aspiration: *Sancta Maria, Stella Orientis, filios tuos adiuvia!* Holy Mary, Star of the East, help your children! He never tired of praying for this intention, in spite of the fact that over the years not even the slightest opening appeared on the horizon.

Later, when unexpectedly the walls built up by violence began to crumble, our beloved Don Alvaro del Portillo gave the go ahead for the apostolic expansion of Opus Dei to these countries. First Poland; then, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Baltic countries. In recent years, Slovenia and Croatia. And today the moment has finally arrived to begin apostolic activities in Russia. Let us give thanks to God and, through the intercession of our Lady and St. Josemaría, let us beseech divine assistance in these first steps.

2. This happy coincidence presents me with the opportunity to recall the indispensable instruments for the success of any apostolate. We already know this quite well, but it is good to meditate on it from time to time. Thus we will be prepared to rectify the course of our actions, if ever the need arise.

The guiding principle is very clear: human means, no matter how plentiful, are never sufficient to carry forward a supernatural task. We see this in the Gospel of today’s Mass. St. Luke recounts for us in great detail
the first miraculous catch of fish. Peter and his companions had been working all night. As so often they had done before, they had cast their nets out into the Lake of Tiberias, in areas where they knew fish were plentiful. But this time it had all been in vain. When Jesus invited them to put out into the deep and cast their nets again, Peter, who was the boat’s captain, responded frankly: Master, we have been fishing during the whole night and have not caught anything. Nevertheless, Peter added immediately: at thy word we will cast out the nets. They did so and caught a great quantity of fish. So many that the nets were breaking (Lk 5:5-6).

The first and indispensable condition for gathering apostolic fruit is to employ the supernatural means. Prayer and mortification (which is nothing other than “the prayer of the senses,” as St. Josemaría put it) are indispensable, along with offering to God one's work, done as perfectly as possible. I remind you of our Father’s teaching: “In apostolic undertakings it’s very good—it’s a duty—to consider what means the world has to offer you (2 + 2 = 4). But don’t forget—ever!—that your calculations must fortunately include another term: God + 2 + 2...” (The Way, no. 471).

In addition, our Lord also wants us to use in his service the material means that we have available. He could do everything himself, but he doesn’t want to work that way. We learn this from the first reading. After creating the world with his omnipotence, and creating with special love the first man and woman, the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed...to till it and keep it.

St. Josemaría found great meaning in this passage from Sacred Scripture. From the moment our Lord made his will known to him, he saw in these words from Genesis one of the keys to our duty to sanctify our work and to sanctify ourselves by means of work. He found another key in the example of Jesus, who worked for thirty years in the workshop at Nazareth. Hence our duty to employ human means as well in building up the kingdom of God, while never forgetting the absolute priority of the supernatural means.

To bring forward any apostolic activity we have to trust above all in God’s help, while at the same time putting at the service of the apostolate material means as well. The apostolic activities of Opus Dei, for example, need the collaboration of many people, through their prayers and their
help. Thus, with God’s grace and the generous contribution of so many men and women from all sectors of society, an ever greater evangelizing work in the service of the Church is carried out throughout the whole world.

3. Before finishing, I would like to briefly consider the second reading. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul strengthens our hope in the face of difficulties. For, he tells us, *you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, Abba! Father!* it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit, that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified (Rom 8:15-17).

If we try to fulfill the will of our Father God in everything, if we accept Jesus’ words telling us to put out into the sea, if we place all our trust in prayer and sacrifice, closely united to our Lord’s Cross, if we carry out our professional work with human responsibility, then the Holy Spirit will grant abundant fruit to our apostolic activities.

To conclude, let us meditate on some words of Benedict XVI taken from a homily that he gave on the feast of Pentecost: “Anyone who has come across something true, beautiful and good in his life—the one true treasure, the precious pearl—hastens to share it everywhere, in the family and at work, in all the contexts of his life. He does so without any fear, because he knows he has received adoption as a son; without any presumption, for it is all a gift; without discouragement, for God’s Spirit precedes his action in people’s hearts and as a seed in the most diverse cultures and religions. He does so without restraint, for he bears a piece of good news which is for all mankind and for all peoples” (Benedict XVI, *Homily on the Vigil of Pentecost*, June 3, 2006).

These words of the Holy Father—let us pray every day for him and for his intentions—can spur us on in our personal apostolate with our relatives and friends. Let us strive to bring them close to our Lord, especially in the Eucharist and through Confession, the sacrament of a personal encounter with the God who is our Father, always ready to forgive our sins.

With sure hope, let us entrust the supernatural fruit of the apostolate of all Christians, now and in the future, to our Lady, Queen of Apostles, and
At the Mass of thanksgiving for the dedication of a street to St. Josemaría, Fiuggi, Italy (June 23, 2007)

At the thanksgiving Mass for the Dedication of a street to St. Josemaria

We are gathered here to celebrate this Eucharist, in which we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to God for his fatherly concern for this beloved town of Fiuggi.

The Gospel of today’s Mass takes place on the waters of the Sea of Galilee. Peter, invited by the Master, has put out from the shore following an indication that, from a purely human point of view, doesn’t seem to make much sense, since it is not the right time for fishing. But human logic is not God’s logic, and man’s time is not God’s time. Peter does not understand this yet. But he intuits it, and not without a certain trepidation in his heart he trusts in the Master’s words; he puts out into the deep and casts his nets once again, and they are filled to overflowing with fish. The Peter who returns to shore is no longer the same Peter. That day, on the lake, Peter the fisherman has become Peter the apostle, a fisher of men.[1]

My mind now turns to a different disembarking and to different waters: to the arrival of St. Josemaría in Italy, at Genoa, in 1946. It was precisely on June 23, at this hour, that the saint began his trip towards the Eternal City. How many dreams and hopes accompanied him! The Roman Pontiff, the Church, Opus Dei, this beloved Italian nation, so many souls searching for Christ. And together with all the hopes, also some concerns, because the Work was a reality that was still partly unknown, and to some it seemed like an ideal that was too daring, almost revolutionary. St. Josemaría, nevertheless, was convinced that this was the opportune moment, God’s
time. He felt the urgent need to obtain from the Holy See an approval for Opus Dei that was suited to the characteristics God had shown him, also because these characteristics were already abundantly taking shape in the lives of many men and women of all walks of life. But the path did not seem an easy one. As yet nothing like this existed in the Church!

St. Josemaría’s great spiritual co-worker, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, my beloved predecessor, had even heard in the Roman Curia that Opus Dei had arrived “a hundred years too soon.” What could be done? The obstacle rose up imposingly, like a mountain blocking the path.

Nevertheless, God had put great care into preparing his instrument, letting him sense deeply the indestructible certainty of his fatherly nearness. *Inter medium montium pertransibunt aquae!*\(^2\) “Through the midst of the mountains the waters shall pass.” Many years earlier, God had made these words reverberate in the depths of his soul, engraving them forever in his heart. If the Work was God’s, God would see to it that any obstacle was removed, even the most daunting, since nothing is impossible for God. Therefore St. Josemaría, realizing that divine plans are fulfilled to the extent that one puts into play all of one’s resources, no matter how little they might be, decided to expend generously all of his energy back in that hot summer of 1946.

Some days later he came to Fiuggi with Msgr. Larraona, who at that time held an important position in a Pontifical Congregation. One could say that Fiuggi, after Genoa and a brief stay in Rome, was the third city that extended hospitality to St. Josemaría.

Those days in Fiuggi were days of intense work, with optimum results, because the hand of God granted speed and precision to the hands of men. The work progressed at such a rapid pace that Father Larraona could say: “in a few months, work was completed that would have taken several years to do, if it got done at all.”\(^3\) Thanks to that effort, a few months later Opus Dei obtained its first Pontifical approval, on February 24, 1947, an important stage in its canonical path.

During those months the Founder had the opportunity to explain to many people, among them the Holy Father Pius XII (who granted him two audiences) the secularity that is an essential characteristic of Opus Dei. He
made it clear that the Work is simply a small part of the Church, made up
of men and women who know themselves called to holiness, without for
that reason feeling any need to leave the place they occupy in society. God
enters their lives, giving them a new meaning, although, as the Founder
wrote, “exteriorly nothing has changed. God wants us to serve him precisely
where our human vocation has led us: in our professional work.”[4]

As is clear to Christians of our time (although it’s always good to repeat
it), the call to sanctity is not a privilege for a “chosen few.” We all can and
should love God above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves, without
dreaming of better times or worlds. We should do so precisely in our city,
in our neighborhood, “in the middle of the street,” as St. Josemaría used to
say. The image of the street, of the path, and of the wayfarer who travels
along it, was for him almost a metaphor of the situation of a Christian, who
travels towards the Father’s house.

My dear brothers and sisters, the saints are not models to be admired
from afar. They are our traveling companions in this great, beautiful family
of the Church. With what great affection St. Josemaría is watching us from
heaven right now! For this friend of ours—of yours!—is interceding for
everyone in Fiuggi. He accompanies and protects you always, helping
everyone to walk along the path of sanctity. At times paths become
tortuous; one has to ford deep rivers; frequently one stumbles, and all this is
normal, our Lord knows that. The important thing is not to never fall
down, but to be determined to get up quickly, to ask our Lord for
forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance, which St. Josemaría used to call
“the sacrament of joy.” Our Lord, as he did with Peter and the disciples,
becomes our traveling companion in the Eucharistic Bread. Let us
approach the Eucharist filled with faith, participating attentively in Holy
Mass. And thus, nourished by this Bread, we will truly go far, and our
strength will never fail us.

We find ourselves in the church dedicated to Our Lady Queen of
Peace, Regina Pacis. This is yet another reason we have a special bond with
St. Josemaría, since his mortal remains are preserved in Rome, in the
prelatic church dedicated to Our Lady of Peace. Holy Mary, Queen of
Peace, always watch over your children in Fiuggi.

Finally, I ask that you to pray for Pope Benedict XVI and for all
At the priestly ordination of faithful of the Prelature, St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome (May 26, 2007)

At the priestly ordination of faithful of
the Prelature, St. Eugene's Basilica

Dear brothers and sisters. My dear deacons.

1. You have been preparing for many months now for this day in which our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of the imposition of my hands and the consecratory prayer, will constitute you priests of the New Covenant. Many people throughout the world—your families, your friends, all of your brothers and sisters in Opus Dei—have prayed, and continue to pray, for each one of you.

Our prayer has been even more intense in these last days, as we were preparing for Pentecost. We have sought to imitate Jesus’ apostles, who after the ascension of our Lord to heaven, came together in the Cenacle of Jerusalem to keep vigil “with one accord in prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”[1]

Finally, the great day has arrived. This Basilica of St. Eugene is for us today that Upper Room where the Blessed Virgin Mary, the apostles and the holy women waited for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Mary, Mother of

---

[1] Mt 4:19; Mk 1:16.
Jesus and our Mother, teaches us to pray. Our Lady shows us, as the Pope said in his recent visit to Brazil, “the way to open our minds and hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes to fill the whole world.”[2]

Once again, hidden under the liturgical signs, the Paraclete will descend upon the Church and over each one of us. He will descend upon each of these deacons, transforming them into priests of Jesus Christ: priests forever. Let us recollect ourselves, then, and meditate on the presence and action of the Paraclete in the Church and in our souls. He is the Dominus tecum! —“the Lord is with you”—that we recall in the Hail Mary.

2. The Scripture readings of the Mass speak to us about the universality of the sanctifying action of God the Holy Spirit. “Then, afterward, I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind....Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be rescued.”[3] In the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul states that, although we have already received the first fruits of the Spirit, all of us “groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”[4] That is, for the full manifestation of the sanctifying action of God.

But who is the Holy Spirit? How does he act? How can we better prepare ourselves to receive him? These questions find a clear response in Christian doctrine. “The Holy Spirit, in effect, is one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, consubstantial with the Father and the Son: ‘with the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.’... The Holy Spirit is at work with the Father and the Son from the beginning to the completion of the plan for our salvation.”[5]

He is the infinite Love between the Father and the Son, the eternal Gift that they give to each other, the Bond uniting the Holy Trinity.

When we think of God, we find it easy to direct ourselves to the Father and the Son, who make themselves more accessible through our own experiences of human paternity and filiation. Moreover, in the Gospels we have many accounts referring to the earthly life of the Son. It is more difficult, however, to have an idea of the Holy Spirit; and yet, it is a necessity for us. St. Josemaría used to say that “the action of the Holy Spirit can pass unnoticed, because God does not reveal to us his plans, and
because man’s sin clouds over the divine gifts. But faith reminds us that God is always acting. He has created us and maintains us in existence and he leads all creation by his grace toward the glorious freedom of the children of God (ref. Rom 8, 21).”[6]

In reality, the Paraclete is little known among Christians, because they lack the desire to deal with him and to spread to others his great love for us. For this reason, the founder of Opus Dei called him the Great Unknown. But it does not have to be that way. God the Father out of his immense goodness, not satisfied with giving us his Son Jesus, the Word Incarnate, has also given us the Holy Spirit. Since our Baptism, the triune God dwells in our souls through sanctifying grace. By this sanctifying grace we are able to call ourselves and truly be sons of God. Dear brothers and sisters, let us decide to seek the Holy Spirit in the depths of our souls, to speak with him, to direct ourselves to him in any situation. And thus, our everyday life will acquire greater height and depth, and a supernatural meaning.

3. The liturgy of the Church is rich in symbols that allude to the Paraclete. Such symbols can help us to reflect on the Holy Spirit and his action in our souls. The sequence Veni, Sancte Spiritus that we pray in the Mass today and tomorrow, as well as the hymn Veni, Creator Spiritus that we sing during the ordination, are full of these symbols. I would like to briefly comment on a few.

Already in its first stanza, the sequence speaks of the Holy Spirit as the light of the soul, beseeching him to send us from heaven a “ray of his light,” and inviting us to pray: “Oh most blessed light, fill the hearts of your faithful.” The sequence contrasts the light with the darkness. It is a fact of life: a world without light would be a dead world. The Spirit dispels the darkness of sin, reminds us of Christ’s teachings, and helps us to deepen our knowledge of these teachings. The Holy Spirit shows us the beauty of our Father God and makes us aspire to heavenly goods. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “through his grace, the Holy Spirit is the first to awaken faith in us and to communicate to us the new life, which is to know the Father and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ.”[7]

To you, my deacon sons, the Paraclete will give, together with the priesthood, the power to teach with authority the truths of the faith and Christian morality. You will be his instruments to enlighten souls and to
answer the questions that often trouble people’s hearts: the meaning of suffering, of life and death; the immense love of God the Father for all his creatures; the duties of justice and charity (they are inseparable) towards all men and women. Keep in mind the teaching of St. Josemaría: “We priests should only speak about God. We will not speak about politics, nor sociology, nor topics that are inappropriate to our priestly work. And in this way we will love the Holy Church and the Roman Pontiff.”[8]

The Holy Spirit is also compared to water, as we just heard in the Gospel reading. On the final and most solemn day of the feast of Tabernacles, Jesus proclaimed: “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive,”[9] comments St. John.

In the sacrament of Penance, my sons, you will be able to wash away the stains of sin in souls, to forgive their sins in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ, owing to the mercy of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank the Lord—we all give him thanks—for this incredible gift which our merciful God has placed in our poor hands, and try to make the most out this gift of his mercy. Following the example and advice of St. Josemaría, dedicate many hours to the ministry of Confession. It is never time wasted; on the contrary, it is time very well spent, because there is no greater “business” than saving souls, than being in the state of grace.

In as much as he is Love, the Holy Spirit is compared to the fire that warms hearts and enkindles in them love for God and for one’s brothers and sisters. It was as fire that the Paraclete descended upon the Church on the day of Pentecost. He instills in us this love, above all by giving us Jesus in Eucharistic Communion. The same Spirit who, descending upon the most holy womb of Mary, made possible the incarnation of the Word now transubstantiates the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

My beloved deacons, when today the Paraclete descends upon you, he will impress upon your souls the priestly character, an indelible sign that will conform you to Christ the Eternal High Priest. The Holy Spirit will confer upon you all the powers that our Lord has granted to his ministers.
Among these powers, the most wonderful and fundamental for the life of the Church is the possibility of acting in persona Christi Capitis, that is, to act in the name and person of Christ during the Sacrifice of the Mass. With St. Josemaría, I invite all of you to consider “the extraordinary importance and abundance of the Paraclete when the priest renews the sacrifice of Calvary by celebrating Mass on our altars.”[10] How thankful we should be to God the Holy Spirit for this gift of love that is the Holy Eucharist!

Before concluding, I would like to recall another sign, which the Scriptures use to speak of the Holy Spirit: wind St. Luke at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles recounts that “when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”[11] The effects of that divine outpouring were immediately felt. Peter and the other Apostles, having cast aside all their fears, went forth to announce courageously the Resurrection of Jesus, and they won for the Church a great number of people.

We should never forget that, although the difficulties in our personal lives or in the apostolate may be great at times, greater still is the action of the Holy Spirit in the souls of those who follow his inspirations. We can overcome all obstacles with prayer, with the frequent reception of the sacraments, and with complete docility to the Paraclete.

4. I reminded you at the beginning how we find ourselves in this Basilica as in that Upper Room at Jerusalem, gathered together around Mary. Let us ask her to intercede maternally for the Holy Father and all the Bishops, for the new priests, for their families, for all priests and for the entire People of God. I make my own the prayer of the Pope at an ordination ceremony a few weeks ago. Benedict XVI said: “Let us pray that in every parish and Christian community attention to vocations and to the formation of priests may increase. This formation begins in the family, continues in the seminary, and it involves all who have at heart the salvation of souls.”[12]

May this urgent petition never be lacking in our daily prayers. Thus the Paraclete—through the intercession of Mary, Mother of priests—will inspire many holy priests of Christ in the Church. Amen.
At the Mass In Cena Domini, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 5, 2007)

In the Mass in cena Domini, in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace

1. Nos autem gloriari oportet in cruce Domini nostri Iesu Christi.

The Mass in Cena Domini opens with these words, marking the beginning of the Paschal Triduum: three days of great solemnity in which we celebrate the central mysteries of our Redemption. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, move our hearts and strengthen our wills so that during these days—and always—we may follow our Savior as closely as possible. Let us glory in the Cross, the emblem of the Christian, upon which our Lord won for us salvation, life and resurrection.

What were the sentiments of Jesus Christ as the Passion approached?
Saint Luke and Saint John, each in their own way, describe them with precision. Saint Luke recalls our Lord’s words to the Apostles at the Last Supper: “With what longing have I longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15). And Saint John gives us the explanation for this ardent desire: “Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to leave this world for the Father, having loved his own in the world, loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1).

Let us meditate upon our Lord’s words on that memorable night. Taking bread and wine in his hands, he said to the Apostles: “This is my body, which is given up for you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19-20). From that moment on, each time the Holy Mass is celebrated, the paschal mystery of Christ’s Passion, Death and Resurrection becomes truly present on our altars.

2. The Servant of God John Paul II pointed out in his final encyclical that the Sacrifice of the Cross “is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only after he had left us a means of sharing in it as if we had been present there.”[1] This marvelous and moving supernatural reality could only be brought about by the Omnipotence and Love of God. The Mass is the means that our Lord left us so that we could personally take part in the sacrifice of Golgotha as if we had been present there. Let us pause to consider for a few moments these words of John Paul II.

3. A great variety of people were present on Calvary. And their attitudes were also quite varied. Only the mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross, fully shared in her Son’s sacrifice and united herself intimately to him, filled with faith, hope and love. Saint John and the holy women, who accompanied her, were there motivated by love and gratitude. The chief priests, the scribes and the Pharisees, who had organized our Lord’s death, were motivated by hatred and envy. The Roman soldiers, charged with carrying out the sentence, were there to fulfill their duty. Others, finally, were motivated simply by curiosity.

My dear brothers. With which of these people do we identify ourselves when we attend Holy Mass, which is the sacramental representation of the
Sacrifice of Calvary? You will tell me, and I tell myself, that we do not want to be, in any way, hate-filled men, nor passive spectators; that our deepest desire is to act as did our Lady. But we should ask ourselves: is this desire expressed in deeds, does it become a reality in my life?

Meditating on Jesus’ boundless love, who gives himself to us in the Eucharist—in Holy Mass and in the Tabernacle—that cry of St. Josemaría in contemplating one of the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary should break forth from our heart: “Never again, Jesus, Never again.”[2]

Let us also tell him: Lord, we don’t want to leave you alone on the Cross. From now on, with your grace, I will strive to draw from the Holy Mass the immense supernatural riches that it contains.

But good desires are not enough. We need to make specific resolutions. And one very important one is to prepare ourselves well, each time we get ready to take part in the Holy Sacrifice.

The priesthood is intimately united to the Mass. Priests are for the Eucharist: to consecrate it and distribute it to the faithful, preparing them first, through preaching and the sacrament of Penance, to receive our Lord with the best possible dispositions. Today is also the day of the institution of the ministerial priesthood. What a good moment to beseech God that the Church may never lack good shepherds—holy, learned, self-sacrificing, and abundant! Let us pray for this intention with faith and trust. And let us also pray for the Pope.

4. In his recent apostolic exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis, Benedict XVI stressed: “In the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a ‘thing,’ but himself; he offers his own body and pours out his own blood. He thus gives us the totality of his life and reveals the ultimate origin of this love. He is the eternal Son, given to us by the Father.”[3]

Seeing this outpouring of divine love, our only reaction can be that “love is repaid with love.” How can we correspond to our Lord’s self-giving for each one of us?

In the first place, by giving ourselves, each in the way that God indicates. Therefore, if the Holy Spirit suggests to any of you the possibility of dedicating yourself totally to the service of God and souls, be generous,
without bargaining or being half-hearted. The world needs many people who are *apostles of apostles*, and God always gives them the graces needed to correspond, and he fills their heart and life with joy.

The second consequence is expressed thus by the Pope: “The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God’s love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him.”[4]

Apostolate, my children, apostolate! That is how we will correspond to Christ’s self-giving.

With St. Josemaría, I remind you that the Christian path “can be summed up in one word: love. If we are to love, we must have a big heart and share the concerns of those around us. We must be able to forgive and understand; we must sacrifice ourselves, with Jesus Christ, for all souls. If we love with Christ’s heart, we shall learn to serve others and we shall defend the truth clearly, lovingly. If we are to love in this way, we need to root out of our individual lives everything which is an obstacle to Christ’s life in us: attachment to our own comfort, the temptation to selfishness, the tendency to be the center of everything. Only by reproducing in ourselves the word of Christ can we transmit it to others. Only by experiencing the death of the grain of wheat can we work in the heart of the world, transforming it from within, making it fruitful.”[5]

Let us place in our Lady’s hands the fruit of this Easter Triduum. Mary, fully united to her Son’s life and death, will ensure that it is abundant and filled with fragrance: the fragrance of a life dedicated entirely to the service of the Church and all souls. Amen.


At the Easter Vigil, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 7, 2007)

At the Easter Vigil, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace

1. We have been listening to the account of our Lord’s Resurrection according to St. Luke. When the women reach the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body, they find it empty. Two angels tell them: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen” (Lk 24:3—4).

Surrexit Dominus vere, alleluia! The Lord has truly risen. “Life has overcome death,” exclaims St. Josemaría in contemplating this miracle (Holy Rosary, First glorious mystery). And just as Jesus died for you and for me, so is his glorious resurrection for each one of us. As the conqueror of the devil, of sin, and of death, Christ wants to make all men and women sharers in his victory. Already now, on earth, he enables us to conquer sin and the devil; and he promises us that we will resurrect in glory, at the end of time, if we truly unite ourselves to him and do not abandon him.

We can ask ourselves: How does Christ communicate to us the fruits of his victory? How do we unite ourselves to him? There is only one answer: through Baptism and the reception of the other sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist. Our Lord has left everything required for his Church, in order to share with us his immortal life, his life of endless happiness. And he wants to rely on us.

2. “All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus,” writes St. Paul in the passage that we have just read from the epistle to the Romans, “were baptized into his death” (Rom 6:3). St. Thomas Aquinas says that, through Baptism, upon being submerged in Christ’s death, all of his merits are applied to us as though each of us had suffered and died with him (cf. S. Th. III, q. 69, a. 2). “We were buried therefore,” continues St. Paul, “with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

To live a new life. This is the great gift and, at the same time, the great commitment that we have acquired with God in Baptism, and that we are
going to ratify in a few moments when we renew our baptismal promises. What a good moment to give thanks to God for our Christian vocation! What a good moment to ask pardon for our sins and to renew our resolution to follow him always, without letting ourselves be dazzled by false attractions!

But we have to reaffirm with deeds the choice we have made, corresponding to what our Lord has done for each of us. When, in response to the questions we are asked in this solemn liturgy, you say that you are ready to renounce Satan, his works, and his seductions, and that you believe in God the Father almighty, and in Jesus Christ his Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and in the Catholic Church, don’t say it only with your lips. May the response come from your soul: from your intellect and heart! Consider in those moments—let each of us consider—what that renunciation of sin and that self-giving to God means specifically for me, here and now. Let it be a sincere answer. Let us not leave Jesus Christ alone.

3. In his encyclical Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict XVI invites us to rediscover that God is Love and, specifically, to fix our eyes “on the pierced side of Christ.” And he adds: “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” (no. 12).

Corresponding to the Love of God means deciding seriously to be saints; that is to say, it means deciding to follow, to love, to identify oneself with Jesus Christ. This divine call, directed to everyone, today has a special resonance. But it requires struggling each day to seek personal contact with our Lord in prayer and in the sacraments; to strive to find him in all the incidents of each day: in study and in work, in family life and when with friends, in sports, in suffering… in everything! But we have to want this with all our strength.

Let us recall what St. Josemaría wrote in The Way, many years ago now: “You tell me: ‘Yes, I want to!’ Good. But do you ‘want to’ as a miser wants his gold, as a mother loves her child, as a worldling wants honors, or as a poor sensualist wants his pleasure? No? Then you don’t ‘want to!’” (The Way, no. 316). If we don’t make a serious effort, day after day, to truly become saints, none of our accomplishments on earth will be worth
anything: they will be like the dust that is scattered by the wind.

4. Sanctity, identification with Jesus Chris, is a personal reality, but it is not individualistic. We are all responsible for the mission of the Church; we all have to do apostolate. How? With your good example; with your words spoken in confidence to a friend, to a classmate or colleague, who perhaps is a good person—loyal, hardworking, a good student—but who doesn’t practice the faith, who doesn’t know Christ’s truth.

John Paul II, in his apostolic letter for the new millennium, recalled the Gospel scene in which some Greeks approach the apostle Philip and tell him: “we wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21). The Pope wrote: “Like those pilgrims of two thousand years ago, the men and women of our own day...ask believers not only to ‘speak’ of Christ, but in a certain sense to ‘show’ him to them” (Novo Millennio Ineunte, no. 16). This is the duty of the Church and of every Christian. Ask yourself: Is my behavior such that those around me can see in me a reflection of Jesus?

This doesn’t mean that we don’t have defects and mistakes. Rather it means that, immediately after our mistakes, whether small or great (if such should ever occur), we have to know how to get up, in a constant beginning and beginning again with God’s grace, which will never be lacking to us. Therefore, I insist, we have to follow Jesus very closely: through prayer, through sacrifice, through frequenting the sacraments.

This last consideration is a wonderful resolution that you can make at the end of these days in Rome: to maintain an intimate dialogue with Jesus, to be attentive to your plan of life every day, struggling to intensify your conversation with him and, as a result, growing in your hunger to bring many other people to our Lord. Speaking about apostolic zeal, St. Josemaria said on one occasion: “You have to open yourself like a fan, like a hand with each finger holding up a group of souls, both easy and difficult ones. And then draw them up!” (Notes taken from his preaching, April 10, 1952).

Let us ask our Lady, Queen of Apostles: Mother, may these daughters of yours who have gathered here in Rome, close to the successor of St. Peter, return to their homes firmly decided not to leave your Son Jesus
alone, to follow him very closely, bringing with them a large number of souls. And doing so with the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

Back to Contents

At the Mass in suffrage for the soul of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome (March 23, 2007)

In the Mass for the repose of the soul of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, St. Eugene's Basilica

My dear brothers and sisters:

1. To begin, I suggest that you raise your heart in thanksgiving to God because all over the world thousands and thousands of people are gathering today to thank heaven for the apostolic effectiveness of the life of our beloved Don Álvaro del Portillo, Bishop and Prelate of Opus Dei.,

Jesus' words in the Gospel still resound in our ears: “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will” (Mt 11:25-26).

Among the truths revealed by Christ, that of our divine filiation fills our souls with joy whenever we pause to meditate on it. For in the baptismal font our Lord Jesus Christ has made us true sons and daughters of God the Father through the grace of the Holy Spirit. From that moment on, made sharers in the divine nature, we began to form part of God’s family. St. Paul’s words to the Romans have recalled this truth to us: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God 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…and it makes us cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Rom 8:14-15).

Being God’s children in Christ is distinctive of Christians, the fundamental condition of Christ’s followers. As you well know, St. Josemaría Escrivá received from God a very lively sense of his divine filiation, both in his personal life and in order to teach it to others. It
formed a constant theme in his preaching. “All men,” he wrote, “are children of God. But a child can look upon his father in many ways. We must try to be children who realize that the Lord, by loving us as his children, has taken us into his house, in the middle of the world, to be members of his family, so that what is his is ours, and what is ours is his, and to develop that familiarity and confidence which prompts us to ask him, like children, for the moon”[1]

2. This message, which is perennially valid, is even more urgent during the weeks we spend preparing for Easter. For by his death and resurrection our Lord has gained for us adoptive sonship: an immense dignity that the human mind would never have been able to imagine. The Fathers of the Church, when explaining this truth, could not cease expressing their amazement. “What is more astonishing,” asked St. Peter Chrysologus, “that God gave himself to the world, or that he gives us heaven? That he united himself to our flesh, or that he introduces us into communion with his divinity? That he took death upon himself, or that he calls us out from death? That he was born in the form of a slave, or that he engenders in us the condition of his children? That he took on our poverty, or that he made us his heirs, co-heirs with his only Son? Yes, what causes more astonishment is to see the earth changed into heaven, man transformed by divinity, the servant with a right to his lord’s inheritance.”[2]

Faith in our divine filiation in Christ should stir up in us, whenever we stop to meditate on it, great astonishment and joy. We should never let ourselves grow accustomed to this reality! This is how Bishop Álvaro del Portillo lived, especially after the beginning of his vocation to Opus Dei, when he learned and fully experienced the practical consequences of this truth. Our beloved Don Alvaro perfectly assimilated the teachings of St. Josemaría; he made them flesh of his flesh, life of his life. Those of us who knew him always recall his serenity and peace, the trusting abandonment in the hands of God that he transmitted to those around him—sometimes with just a look, with just his presence—that stemmed from knowing and feeling himself to be a son of God.

This feature that so marked his life takes on for us today the value of an example. From heaven he invites us to recall our divine filiation at every moment, and especially when life’s circumstances try to submerge us in
sadness or discouragement. Let us listen to some words of his, taken from a pastoral letter. “The knowledge that we are dearly beloved children of God moves us powerfully. Frequent meditation on this truth brings with it very specific consequences for our interior struggle, our work and our apostolate: for all our conduct. Anchored in filial piety, faith becomes unshakeable, hope secure, charity ardent. No difficulty, whether from within or from without, can cause our optimism to waver, even though externally everything may be difficult for us. And as an inseparable contribution of this most precious gift, there comes to one’s soul the gaudium cum pace, the joy and peace that is so characteristic of the sons and daughters of God...so that we might sow it around us with great abundance.”[3]

3. Many of those taking part in this Holy Mass have come to Rome on the occasion of the International Family Congress. You are here to once more give witness to the beauty of the family, which is based on marriage, and to contribute to the solution of some of the problems confronting civil society in our day and age. Aware of your divine filiation, and fully consistent with your Christian faith, you know very well that there are certain points we have to defend at all costs and promote with courage and perseverance for the good of all men and women. We are spurred on to do so by loyalty to the law of God and, as a result, by the desire to sow peace and joy in souls.

The Holy Father Benedict XVI frequently speaks about these topics, explaining untiringly that it is not licit to make concessions here because what is at play is the destiny of civil society. Recently he once again addressed these themes in his apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist. Speaking about “Eucharistic consistency,” the Pope writes: “Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others: it demands a public witness to our faith.”[4] Benedict XVI points out certain fundamental values that we have to defend and give witness to: “respect for human life, its defense from conception to natural death, the family built upon marriage between a man and a woman, the freedom to educate one’s children and the promotion of the common good in all its forms. These values are not negotiable.”[5]

Life, the family, freedom: three important topics of interest to all men and women of good will, because they are deeply rooted in human nature. It
is obvious that on some of these points it is especially up to married people to give a human and Christian response, with their words and deeds. I invite you, therefore, to redouble your efforts and to unite yourselves to so many others, including non-Catholics and non-Christians, who feel threatened in their deepest convictions, in order to overcome the challenge launched by a secularized and relativistic mindset.

4. This effort to defend the Christian roots of our society was very dear to Don Álvaro. I recall the promptness and determination with which he always seconded the Pope’s directives. For example, I remind you of his pastoral letter written in December 1985, to encourage the faithful and cooperators of the Prelature of Opus Dei to take an active part in the new evangelization of society. In those pages, after explaining the dangers menacing society when it fails to recognize God’s primary place, my beloved predecessor urged all of us to undertake specific and incisive action. And he stressed that the most effective remedy is interior life, each person’s union with God and, as a necessary consequence, personal apostolate, through one’s ordinary life of work and social relations.[6]

On offering this Mass in suffrage for Don Álvaro on the thirteenth anniversary of his departure from this world, we ask that he intercede for these intentions. We entrust them especially to the one who bore in her womb Life with a capital letter, the Son of God made Man. May the Most Holy Virgin, Mother of God and our Mother, Queen of the Family, help us to carry forward this apostolate that is so important in the present moments of the world and the Church. Amen.

[1] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 64.
[5] Ibid.
Articles and Interviews

Lenten Conference The Eucharist, Mystery of Light, Basilica of St. Mary Major, Rome (March 29, 2007)

Lenten Conference, “The Eucharist, Mystery of light,” at the Basilica of St. Mary Major, Rome

When meditating on the institution of the Eucharist, the fifth mystery of light, a question arises: how can we contemplate it in its proper perspective? The evangelists Luke and John give us the answer, by revealing to us the heart of Jesus when he instituted this great mystery.

Luke cites the words of Jesus himself: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15). Our Lord’s heart harbored a longing in which the twelve apostles held an important place. What he fervently desired was to celebrate the paschal meal precisely with them. He knew that what was about to happen in that meal would influence their lives in a decisive way, especially the institution of the Eucharist. This is linked to his passion, which is included in Jesus’ ardent desire, as he himself makes clear to us.

John, when introducing his account of the Last Supper, clarifies the nature and extent of Christ’s desire: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). Only love to the extreme of death on the cross explains all that was about to happen in the paschal triduum that was beginning and
that, passing through his passion and death, would culminate in the resurrection.

The radiation of love emanating from the heart of Christ is the true light that enables us to understand the full meaning of the institution of the Eucharist. St. John, when he relates how Judas left the Cenacle after deciding to hand over Jesus, tells us a specific detail: “It was night” (Jn 13:30). The significance of this fact transcends the simple chronology of the event. St. Augustine comments that Judas himself was the night: that is to say, he bore the darkness within his own heart. Outside was the darkness; in the Cenacle, the light. It was, above all, the light of Christ’s love, which shines forth in the gift of the Eucharist, a gift of inexhaustible richness for our meditation.

Our beloved Pope John Paul II advised all the children of the Church to meditate in the Rosary on the institution of this inestimable gift: “A final mystery of light,” he wrote, “is the institution of the Eucharist, in which Christ offers his Body and Blood as food under the signs of bread and wine, and testifies ‘to the end’ his love for humanity (Jn 13:1), for whose salvation he will offer himself in sacrifice.” Thus the Pope highlights three aspects that sum up everything else: the offering of the Body and Blood of the Lord as food; his love to the end; his sacrifice. Let us begin by considering Christ’s love.

_Eucharistic love_

“The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the events which were about to take place, beginning with the agony in Gethsemane.” Let us consider what Jesus did and said when he instituted the Eucharist. St. Luke tells us: “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’” (Lk 22:19—20).

Jesus says that his body is being given up. Giving is a proof of love, and the more intimate what is given, the greater is the love. Jesus gives his body, his blood, that is to say, his life; he gives himself. It is, above all, a self-giving made to his Father. A precious self-giving, since it stems from his
love, a love obedient to the point of giving his life: “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (Jn 14:31). “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again” (Jn 10:17). Jesus’ obedient love dissolves the huge mound of selfishness and disobedience to God built up throughout the history of mankind. It thus becomes also a gift of love to us, his gift and his Father’s. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

Jesus, with his body and his blood, gives himself to us not only in the hours of his passion and death, but also in the Eucharist. When he promised this gift in the synagogue at Capharnaum, most of those present were disconcerted and incredulous: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (Jn 6:52). They did not believe in his divine power, a creative power filled with infinite love. The Eucharistic gift puts human reason to the test, since it is blinded by such brightness. To walk in this light requires the faith that comes from God, as Jesus explained to them, exhorting them to be docile: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (Jn 6:44-45). But the Eucharistic gift also puts the human heart to the test; it is as it were a challenge to our selfishness, for if Jesus puts himself at our disposition to such an extent, how should we correspond to his generous love? Love demands love. Carelessness and indifference are a sign of a miserly heart.

Christ’s gift affects each one of us personally. We would be mistaken if we considered it as a gift made to the human race as a great anonymous mass. We have to reason in another way, with the logic that St. Paul teaches us: “the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Therefore, when we meditate on the mystery of the institution of the Eucharist, we can listen to Jesus’ words as truly addressed to us, present in the decisive events of the three days of his passion, death and resurrection. And this is not a merely a matter of the imagination. As John Paul II said in his final encyclical, “In this gift Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church the perennial making present of the paschal mystery. With it he brought about a mysterious ‘oneness in time’ between that Triduum and the passage of the centuries.”[4]
By instituting the Eucharist before his passion, Jesus wanted to make certain, so to speak, that he would have us very present in those moments of his redemptive sacrifice, in order to involve us in the great drama of his boundless love. As the Holy Father wrote in his recent Apostolic Exhortation: “The institution of the Eucharist demonstrates how Jesus’ death, for all its violence and absurdity, became in him a supreme act of love and mankind’s definitive deliverance from evil.” With the Eucharist Jesus wanted us to breathe the pure atmosphere of his love, to make it the energy of our life; he wanted to give us the love that is authentic, and teach us to turn it into a life of union, gift, and availability.

All this helps explain why Jesus wanted to accompany the institution of the Eucharist with a long discourse with his disciples in which love is the recurring theme—love to the end, because, as he said, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). This is the love that flows forth from the intimacy of the divine life: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love” (Jn 15:9).

Christ’s sacrifice

The Eucharistic mystery Jesus instituted is the surprising solution to the human impossibility of being able to be present at his redemptive sacrifice. The Eucharist enables us to overcome the distance of miles and centuries separating us from the drama of Calvary. He, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, has manifested his infinite wisdom and unlimited power in making the sacrifice of Calvary the perennial source of divine life for the faithful in the Church. “This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only after he had left us a means of sharing in it as if we had been present there. Each member of the faithful can thus take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits.”

When he said to his Apostles, and in them to their successors in the priesthood, “do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19), Jesus wanted his words to resonate in the Masses of all times, words that transubstantiated the bread into his body “given for you,” and the wine into his blood, “which is poured out for you.” Efficacious words that have never lost their consecratory power throughout the centuries. Christ thus sacramentally
anticipated what would occur in the following hours, up to his last breath on the cross: his body given over and his blood poured out. It was his sacrifice that would be perpetuated each time that priests, celebrating the Eucharist, would follow his command: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

To take part in the sacrifice of Calvary “as if we had been present there.” This is a consoling reality, I might also say an exciting one, but one that at the same time calls us to an inescapable personal effort. In fact, according to the Gospel accounts, there were many people present at Calvary. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was present there, and with her was John, the beloved disciple, and the pious women; the two crucified thieves were there, the centurion and the soldiers, the high priests with the scribes and the elders, and the people passing by, who were quite a few, “for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city” (Jn 19:20). These persons acted in quite different ways: from our Lady’s full union with Jesus and the faith of the repentant thief, to the mocking of many people and the brutality of the soldiers, and the indifference of some of the passers-by. “As if we had been present there.” In what way? The repentant thief acknowledged his sins; the other thief didn’t. The Blessed Virgin Mary was fully united to Jesus in mind and heart; others were only onlookers. Those who mocked seemed to be moved by the devil. Jesus’ words to the Apostles, “do this in remembrance of me,” as he instituted the Eucharist, are addressed not only to his successors in the priesthood but also to every Christian. We should ask ourselves: in my participation at Mass, the memorial of Christ’s sacrifice, with which persons on Calvary do I want to identify myself, and with which do I in fact identify myself?

Jesus’ words affect us personally. Nevertheless, he turned to the apostles gathered there, he spoke to them in the plural. He is concerned about the salvation of all men and women, but here he views all as part of himself, of the Church that is his body, which finds in the Eucharist one of the most decisive moments of its formation, because the sacrifice that in the Eucharist is to be perpetuated down through the centuries is the sacrifice of the New Covenant. The four narrations of the institution of the Eucharist relate our Lord’s words in this regard: “This is my blood of the covenant” (Mt 26:28; cf. Mk 14:24); “this cup…is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).
As Pope John Paul II explains, “the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper laid the foundations of the new messianic community, the People of the New Covenant.”[7] Meditating on the institution of the Eucharist should increase in us the sense of belonging to the Church, of communion with the others, children of God in the Church. It should increase in us our hunger for unity.

The fact of being involved through the Eucharist in Christ's redemptive sacrifice shouldn't lead us only to welcome the graces that come from him and to be moved by his sufferings and immense love. By instituting the Eucharistic mystery, Jesus has wanted something more from us. As the Holy Father taught in his first encyclical: “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.”[8] Like a father who wants to teach his young child to be compassionate and generous with the poor, and who puts some coins in the child’s hand to give to a beggar asking for alms, so Jesus with the Eucharist puts his love in our hands to the extreme of his self-giving on the cross so that we can have something to offer to our Father God. This is not a pious exaggeration; it is the clear doctrine of the Church, as taught by the Second Vatican Council when referring to all the faithful: “Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It.”[9] Jesus offers himself and gives us the possibility of uniting ourselves to his offering.

The source of his sacrifice is his boundless love, both divine and human. This love stems from the fullness of the Holy Spirit that sanctifies his holy humanity and constitutes him as the Christ, the one who fully possesses the anointing of the Spirit. The letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus “through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” (Heb 9:14). As John Paul II explains: “the Holy Spirit acted in a special way in this absolute self-giving of the Son of Man, in order to transform this suffering into redemptive love.”[10] And through the gift of the same Spirit, divine love is infused into us, as St. Paul says: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). Therefore we should not be surprised that Jesus put his love-offering in our hands so that we too can offer it to the Father. He, in coming to us, gives us
his Spirit, who is the Love that, in the bosom of the Trinity, proceeds from
the union of love between the Father and the Son.

*The Spirit teaches us to love.*

There’s still more. We have entered into Jesus’ act of self-offering in
such a way that, in offering the Divine Victim, we can offer ourselves with
him. This also is a gift of Jesus and of his Spirit, as the Church prays in a
Eucharistic Prayer: “May he make us an everlasting gift to you.”[11] A
sacrifice of the whole person, and therefore of one’s actions, as the Council
explains in regard to the laity, although the teaching can be applied to all
the faithful: “all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary
married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental
relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if
patiently borne—all these become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God
through Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord’s
body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist.”[12]
Thus not only do we fulfill the Eucharistic commandment, “do this in
remembrance of me,” but also the other commandments of the Last
Supper: that of service (“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed
your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” Jn 13:14), and that of
love (“a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as
I have loved you, that you also love one another” Jn 13:34).

The commandment of service indicates the exterior form of our
spiritual sacrifice; that of love, the interior form. While the Eucharist gives
us the strength to carry these out. The Eucharist, love, service—three
realities that characterize the Last Supper. Three realities that also define
the life of the Church and that should mark the life of each Christian.

*The gift of the Body and Blood of the Lord*

When instituting the Eucharist, Jesus gave his body as food under the
appearance of bread (“Take, eat, this is my body” Mt 26:26) and his blood
as drink under the appearance of wine (“Drink of it all of you; for this is my
blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of
sins” Mt26:27-28). The promise of the bread of life was fulfilled: “I am the
living bread which came down from heaven. If any one eats of this bread,
he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51).

The Eucharistic gift is the marvelous manifestation of God’s condescension towards us, as the Fathers of the Church liked to say. Let us listen to St. John Chrysostom: “If we were incorporeal, he would have given us purely incorporeal gifts; but since the soul is united to the body, he has given us the spiritual in the sensible. How many say now: I would like to see our Lord, his appearance, his clothes, his shoes. But here you see and touch and eat him. You want to see his clothes, and he gives his very self to you, not only for you to see, but to touch him and to eat him, and to have him within yourself.”[13]

Eucharistic participation in Christ’s redemptive sacrifice is thus converted into intimate union with him. This is represented by the sign of food, the most expressive that exists. It is maximally expressive in the Eucharist because it immeasurably surpasses the mere signification. We receive the body of Christ in all its substantial reality, not only as an operative power in us. Our union with Christ reaches the highest summits, but we dare to affirm it trusting solely in his explicit words: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:56-57).

This parallelism between Eucharistic communion and the intimacy of the Trinitarian union between the Father and the Son leads us to realize that to eat the Body of Christ is the ideal way to profoundly live our condition as sons of God in the Son, that is, in Jesus. The sequence Lauda, Sion of the Roman Missal calls the Eucharist “bread of the children,” bread that feeds us as children, perfecting our participation in the divine filiation of Jesus. We receive it as food, but it is He who assimilates us to Himself. He is the protagonist of Eucharistic communion. Nevertheless, it never eases to be a gift that invites us, that impels us to receive it with adequate interior dispositions. Jesus says: take and eat. He calls us therefore to an active role in his transforming action, that is to say, to second his action in us, without putting up resistance.

This transforming action attains a particular efficacy in Communion, but Jesus remains also after Mass in the tabernacle, because he knows that
we have continual need of him, and he wants to be always accessible to us. St. Josemaría Escrivá, a great lover of the Eucharist, invites us to experience this intimacy with Jesus in the tabernacle: “For me the tabernacle has always been a Bethany, a quiet and pleasant place where Christ resides. A place where we can tell him about our worries, our sufferings, our desires, our joys, with the same sort of simplicity and naturalness as Martha, Mary and Lazarus.”[14]

Anyone who draws close to Jesus in Communion and then in the tabernacle, who knows how to contemplate and listen to his words in the Gospels, little by little is identified with him, and attains, so to speak, his way of thinking and acting and learns to look at others with the eyes of Jesus, as brothers and sisters. He learns to assimilate the commandments of love and of service.

We still need to look at one final point in the words with which Jesus instituted the Eucharist: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). All of us are invited to enter into this “many.” Jesus doesn’t exclude anyone, but anyone can exclude himself, because the blood is poured out for the remission of sins and this remission is not carried out if the person does not break with sin. Therefore the Eucharist is a continuous call to conversion. “The Synod Fathers rightly stated that a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.”[15] The sacrament of conversion, of penance, of confession, of pardon, of reconciliation: these are the names the Catechism of the Catholic Church gives to this sacrament (nos. 1423-1424), which prepares the way for full participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice, for communion with Jesus. If a Christian marked by sin rejects the path instituted by Christ himself to reconcile ourselves with him, how can he draw close to receive him in communion? It would be an irreverent fiction to draw close externally as a friend, while remaining an enemy who does not want to be reconciled with Him.

On designating the institution of the Eucharist as a mystery of light in the holy Rosary, John Paul II offered all the children of the Church a marvelous opportunity to meditate on it frequently, even daily. We would like to find there our Lady, our Mother, but the Evangelists don’t mention her in their accounts of the Last Supper. The Pope himself has shown us
how to find her, inviting us to listen once again to the words of institution: “‘Do this in remembrance of me’ (Lk 22:19). In the ‘memorial’ of Calvary all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present. Consequently all that Christ did with regard to his Mother for our sake is also present. To her he gave the beloved disciple and, in him, each of us: ‘Behold, your Son!’ To each of us he also says: ‘Behold your mother!’ (cf. Jn 19: 26-27).”  

We certainly want to consider these words in meditating on the fifth sorrowful mystery, but also in contemplating the institution of the Eucharist. This is the memorial that makes present what happens on Calvary and that contains the Body and Blood of Jesus, formed in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the first true tabernacle of all time.

[1] “Et ipse qui exivit, erat nox” (“He who went out, was night”) In Ioannis Evangelium, n. 62, 6.


[4] Ecclesia de Eucharistia, no. 5/2


[6] Ecclesia de Eucharistia, no. 11/3


[12] Lumen Gentium, no. 34/2.


On the 80th birthday of Benedict XVI (April 16, 2007)

On the 80th birthday of Benedict XVI

Happy Birthday, Holy Father!

A message published on the Internet on the 80th birthday of Pope Benedict XVI

The birthday of the Holy Father recalls the white smoke from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel on April 19, 2005, white smoke that announced not only an election, but also a sacrifice. It was the sign of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s willing acceptance of the burden of being the successor of St. Peter, at a time when he was looking forward to a well-merited rest after long years of intense work in the Lord’s vineyard.

God gives the Holy Father a universal paternity. To be the Roman Pontiff means to become the father of a multitude of sons and daughters, who have to be guided and cared for in their many needs, and whom he must love in all circumstances.

On an anniversary one’s thoughts usually go to the past, but it is also a time to consider the present and the future. It is a time to imagine all the savory fruits which the tree of the Church will produce through the generosity of Benedict XVI’s dedication. He is a man who has embraced the task entrusted to him as Christ embraced the Cross. And he has done so uniting intellect and humility, kindness and strength.

On the 80th birthday of the Holy Father, we feel the desire to thank him for helping us to appreciate the beauty of the Christian life, and for reminding us of the joy and the freedom of being faithful to the divine
precepts. We also thank him for encouraging us to place charity at the center of our actions.

At the Mass inaugurating his pontificate, Benedict XVI asked Catholics for the help of their prayers. A year later he remarked: “I feel more and more that alone I could not carry out this task, this mission. But I also feel that I am in a great communion and together we can go ahead with the Lord’s mission.... I offer very warm thanks to all those who in various ways support me from close at hand or follow me from afar in spirit with their affection and their prayers. I ask each one to continue to support me, praying to God to grant that I may be a gentle and firm Pastor of his Church.”

This anniversary calls us to pray and offer sacrifices for the Pope and his intentions, so that he will feel the communion of the whole Church in his effort to carry forward the mission which our Lord entrusted to all of us.
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
The Feast of St. Josemaria Escriva throughout the world

On and around June 26, hundreds of dioceses celebrated the liturgical feast of St. Josemaría. The list here of Masses in honor of the founder of Opus Dei makes no attempt to provide a complete account of these events, but simply offers a selection.

Archbishop Donald Wuerl concelebrated the Mass of St. Josemaría with twenty other priests at the national Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Some 900 faithful took part. In his homily Archbishop Wuerl recalled the day on which he accompanied Cardinal John Wright, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, to pray before the mortal remains of Josemaría Escrivá a few hours after his death, noting that people already considered him a saint. At another point of his homily he said: “One of the teachings of St. Josemaría that I have found especially inspiring is that everything we do, day by day, has its own transforming spiritual energy...In this world, with all its temporality, we encounter the means by which the Kingdom of God, the reign of grace, the dominion of the Spirit is extended.” At the end, citing Pope John Paul II's homily during the canonization of St. Josemaría, he invited the faithful to respond to the challenge of Jesus’ words: *duc in altum*, put out into the deep.

The Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Primate of Argentina, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, presided in the metropolitan Cathedral at a Mass concelebrated with Fr. Patricio Olmos, Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Argentina, Msgr. Alberto Perlasca, Secretary of the Apostolic Nunciature, and others. Fr. Olmos said in his homily: “If St. Josemaría were here today, very probably he would invite us to listen and follow the voice of the Spirit who recently spoke through the Latin American bishops in the Assembly at Aparecida. There the bishops proclaimed a ‘great continental mission,’ a great spreading of the Gospel which seeks to reach everyone, and which has as its aim ‘to seek out strayed Catholics and those who know little or nothing about Jesus, so that we can joyfully form the community of our Father God’s love.’”

In Brazil, solemn Masses were celebrated in many cities with large numbers of faithful in attendance and many confessions. The Vida
Television Network, the Catholic national broadcasting company, transmitted throughout the whole country a Mass in honor of St. Josemaría celebrated on the evening of the 26th.

In the Cathedral of the Prelature of Yauyos-Cañete in Peru, a novena was held in preparation for the feast of St. Josemaría. On Tuesday the 26th, in the Shrine of Our Lady Mother of Fair Love, some 1500 people took part in a celebration presided over by Bishop Ricardo Garcia. As is now a tradition, at the end of Mass the statue of St. Josemaría was carried in procession through the city streets.

Also in Peru, another solemn novena was held in Huarrago, which honors St. Josemaría as its patron.

In Montreal, on June 27, the principal celebrant for the Mass of St. Josemaría was Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte, who was joined as concelebrant by the Regional Vicar of the Prelature in Canada and some twenty priests from various dioceses. The cathedral was filled with faithful. Cardinal Turcotte expressed his pleasure and gratitude for the activity of the Work in Canada, especially in his diocese, the first in which Opus Dei was established, fifty years ago now, at the request of the then Archbishop, Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger. At the end of the celebration, two faithful of the Prelature presented him with a pallium embroidered with an image of St. Joseph, in honor of the 25th anniversary of his episcopal ordination.

In Accra, the capital of Ghana, on June 27 a Mass was celebrated in honor of St. Josemaría in the parish of Corpus Christi to Sakumono, on the initiative of a young couple, both of whom are faithful of the Prelature. About a hundred people attended.

A new statue of St. Josemaría was blessed in the cathedral of Delhi by Archbishop Vincent Concessao on June 26th, after a Mass celebrated by him and five other priests in honor of the saint. In his homily Archbishop Concessao spoke about St. Josemaría’s teachings and about the Church’s need for saints, not only in the arched niches of its walls, but also working in factories and in offices, carrying out all kinds of activities. “No matter what work you carry out, serving your neighbor, if you do it for love, conscious of God’s plans for you, you can identify yourself with Christ in your work and draw close to God.” Bernard Alick, the artist who painted
the statue, was one of those who carried it in procession at the end of Mass from the sanctuary to the baptistry where it was installed.

In the community of Aversa, in the province of Caserta, Italy, in addition to a Mass in honor of St. Josemaría in the cathedral presided over by the Archbishop, this year a second Mass was held in the chapel of the San Giuseppe Moscati hospital. The principal celebrant was Fr. Andrea Della Gatta, from the Congregation of the Little House of Nazareth, who had read several writings about St. Josemaría’s concern for the sick and decided to celebrate his feast with the doctors, nurses, and patients of the hospital. At the end of the Mass, a picture of the saint was installed in the chapel.

In Barletta, near Bari, the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría was celebrated in the Church of St. Augustine. The pastor, Fr. Pasquale Barilo, set up a picture of the founder of Opus Dei with the words “May you seek Christ, may you find Christ, may you love Christ.” A large choir contributed to the solemnity of the celebration; its repertory included, among other pieces, an original hymn to St. Josemaría.

In Shanghai a Mass was celebrated in honor of St. Josemaría on his feast day for the second time. It took place in St. Peter’s Church and was attended by about forty people who are in contact with the apostolic work carried out by the Prelature’s faithful and who live or work in Shanghai and adjoining cities.

On July 7, the Regional Vicar of Ireland, Msgr. Robert Bucciarelli, celebrated a Mass in honor of St. Josemaría in the White Abbey of the Carmelites of Kildare. A large number of young families with children attended the ceremony. In his homily, Msgr. Bucciarelli spoke in praise of the good traditions of County Kildare and referred to the apostolic initiatives for families with young children that the faithful of Opus Dei are carrying out in the area, such as the Hill House family center in Naas. After Mass a reception was held in the parish center attached to the Church.

In Helsinki, the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría took place in the cathedral of St. Henry on Monday, June 18. Some seventy people took part. It was an occasion for giving thanks to God for the twenty years of stable work by Opus Dei in Finland. Concelebrating were the Bishop, Josef
Wrobel, the pastor, the cathedral’s chaplain and some priests of the Work. The Bishop then went to visit the new student residence in Helsinki, in the section of the city known as Töölö. He was shown some of the activities that the residence offers to the young men there. At the end of his visit, Bishop Wrobel asked to pray in the oratory with the residents for the success of these activities.

In Rome, as is customary, the prelate of Opus Dei celebrated the Mass of St. Josemaría in St. Eugene’s Basilica.

Dedication of a street to St. Josemaría in Fiuggi (Italy)

On Saturday, June 23, in Fiuggi, a city noted for its thermal springs in the hills to the east of Rome, a street was dedicated to St. Josemaría Escriva, who spent some days there in the summer of 1946. The Prelate of Opus Dei took part in the ceremony.

At city hall, the mayor read the official decree recognizing the presence in Fiuggi of “a saint who left a deep mark on the Christian path of the twentieth century.” The Prelate, on his part, expressed his appreciation to the city for the honor accorded to St. Josemaría and promised his prayers “for all who live in Fiuggi or who will do so in the future.”

Following the ceremony a large group of people accompanied the Prelate to the new “Via San Josemaría Escrivá,” a pleasant tree-lined street where, after a brief greeting to the civil authorities, the Prelate blessed a plaque. Finally, in the church of Our Lady Queen of Peace, Bishop Echevarría celebrated Holy Mass. In his homily he recalled the importance of the work that the saint carried out in Fiuggi in 1946.
A statue on the campus of the University of La Sabana (Colombia)

At the beginning of the 2007 academic year, students, professors, and staff at La Sabana University were present for the installation of a statue of St. Josemaría Escriva in one of the central plazas of the campus. It was paid for by the Fund of the Employees of the University as a manifestation of gratitude and affection to the person who inspired the institution.

The bronze statue is the work of Arturo Guerrero of Ecuador. It is life-sized and weighs approximately five hundred and fifty pounds.

The artist wanted to show St. Josemaría speaking with an expressive gesture of his hands and arms, as if encouraging his listeners to practice what he is telling them. His face has his habitual slight smile.

The statue was blessed by the Vice Chancellor of the university, Msgr. Hernan Salcedo Plazas, on January 19, 2007.

The 80th anniversary of the first Mass of St. Josemaría in Madrid

On the 80th anniversary of the first Mass of St. Josemaría in Madrid, which took place on April 17, 1927, various commemorative acts were held in St. Michael's Basilica, where St. Josemaría had celebrated that first Mass. A solemn Mass was concelebrated by the regional vicar of Opus Dei in Spain, Msgr. Ramon Herrando, and a number of other priests. There was also a projection of a filmed catechetical get-together with St. Josemaría, and a conference on St. Josemaría and his activity in Madrid by Fr. Constantion Anchel, a researcher at the St. Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute.
A parish church of St. Josemaría in Valencia, Spain

On January 10, Valencia’s Archbishop Agustin Garcia-Gasco visited the construction site of the new parish of St. Josemaría Escrivá, in the Campanar district.

The parish church, which is equipped with elevators and access ramps for persons with physical disabilities, has a 92-foot-high bell tower.

In addition to the main church, a daily Mass chapel has seats for 150 people, with independent access and a connection to the central nave.

The rectangular central nave can fit 400 people seated, and includes eight confessionals. The church is presided over by a reredos featuring the Rosary’s Mysteries of Light, made up of five pictures. The one in the center, six and a half feet tall, is dedicated to the Eucharist and to the church’s patron saint. The church also has a side chapel dedicated to our Lady of the Abandoned, with a statue of Our Lady of the Rosary.

Among other social initiatives, the parish offers assistance for immigrants and needy families. A network of volunteers has been organized to help provide assistance.

A commemorative plaque honoring St. Josemaría in Logroño, Spain

On December 1, 2006, a plaque was affixed to the façade of the house at no. 12 Sagasta Street, in Logroño. It included a bas-relief of the founder of Opus Dei with the following words: “St. Josemaría Escrivá. lived with his family in this building from 1915 to 1918 (fourth floor) and from 1921 to 1925 (second floor).” The initiative came from the first deputy mayor of the city, who is in charge of the restoration of the historical heart of Logroño, and from the director of the city’s historical office.
On January 16, 2007, a plaque was also installed at the place where St. Josemaría, one winter morning, saw bare footprints in the snow.

The place is near a building of the Caja Rioja Foundation, on Marqués de San Nicolás Street. The Board of Directors of the Foundation approved, on December 21, 2006, the affixing of this memorial plaque with the following inscription: “St. Josemaría Escrivá. At this site, between December 1917 and January 1918, St. Josemaría Escrivá discovered his vocation of dedication to God, upon seeing the footprints left in the snow by the bare feet of a Carmelite religious walking along this street.”
News
New Centers of the Prelature

The respective Regional Vicars have established Centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Barcelona, Kaunas (Lithuania), and Madrid (3 centers)

Back to Contents

Other News

The book Getsemani, by Bishop Javier Echevarría, has been published in Italian (Edizioni Ares, May 2007).

Éditions des Oliviers has published Mes souvenirs d’Alvaro del Portillo, Prélat de l’Opus Dei, the French translation of the book by Salvador Bernal, originally published in Spanish under the title Recuerdo de Alvaro del Portillo (Remembrances of Alvaro del Portillo).

In Estonia, the Association for Education and Culture in June published the book Jutlused Euharistiat, which includes the two Eucharistic homilies of St. Josemaría in Christ Is Passing By, with an introduction by the Prelate of Opus Dei. Only 0.4% of Estonia’s population is Catholic, and of these only 2,000 are Estonian speakers, almost all of them converts or children of converts. Catholic spiritual reading is, naturally, scarce, but there are now four books by St. Josemaría in Estonian. The other three are The Way, The Way of the Cross, and Holy Rosary.

Back to Contents

Presentation of the book Jesus of Nazareth
On June 6, in Rome, Fr. Bernardo Estrada, professor of New Testament Studies at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, presented *Jesus of Nazareth*, by Pope Benedict XVI, at the ICEF (*Iniziative Culturali, Educative e Familiari*). The session was introduced by a journalist from the RAI television network, Fabio Zavattaro, a specialist in Vatican news.

Confronting theories that try to separate the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith, Professor Estrada stressed the Pope’s unified view of the person of Jesus, seen as the Son of God as defined by the Council of Chalcedon.

The conference also touched on other topics treated in the book: for example, the place of Jesus in the tradition of Israel, and the relationship between the three first Gospels and that of John.

---

Masses in suffrage for the soul of Don Álvaro

On March 23, the anniversary of the death of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, Masses were celebrated in suffrage for the first successor of St. Josemaría in Rome and many other cities throughout the world.

In Colombia, because of calendar problems, some of the Masses were held on days other than the 23rd. In the Cathedral of Bogotá, for example, the Mass for Don Álvaro was celebrated on the 24th, as were those in Medellín and Barranquilla; in Bucaramanga, it was held on the 21st, in Cali, on the 28th; and in Manizales and Cartagena of the Indies, on the 23rd.

In Paris, Msgr. Antoine de Rochebrune, Vicar of the Prelature in France, presided over a Eucharistic concelebration for the soul of Bishop del Portillo on Saturday the 24th in the chapel of the Miraculous Medal (on the rue du Bac), a Marian invocation to which St. Josemaría had great devotion. Several hundred faithful took part. In the parish of St. Pantaleon, in Cologne, the Regional Vicar of the Prelature for Germany, Msgr. Christoph Bockamp, the pastor, Msgr. Peter von Steinitz, and a
representative of the Archdiocese, Msgr. Günter Assenmacher, concelebrated.

A Mass for the eternal repose of Don Alvaro was held in the parish of St. Michael (Lane Cove), in Sydney. The principal celebrant was Msgr. George Rossman, Regional Vicar of Australia and New Zealand. He was joined by a good number of priests of the Prelature and others from the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Back to Contents
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
Crotona Center

The Bronx is a section of New York known mainly for its social problems. If one were to believe the stereotypes, “drugs, crime and poverty” are the only things true about the Bronx. But the reality is much richer.

Root of the problem

John Deida doesn’t deny that his neighborhood in the Bronx suffers from these problems. But he thinks the principle obstacle preventing young people from escaping their situation is what he calls “cultural poverty.” Many boys in the Bronx, explains John, seem to have no interest in improving their situation; they flee from the effort required and seek the easy path. John took part in the Crotona Achievement Center program some years ago, when he was an adolescent. Later he lent a hand as a volunteer, while studying linguistics in the university.

“When I was a volunteer at Crotona,” recalls John, “I frequently had the students read articles from The Economist or the Wall Street Journal out loud, and discussed their content with them. It usually involved a topic of national or international interest.” He found it a good way to help the boys focus their attention and improve their capacity for comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation. But it was also, as Dave Holzweiss (one of the Crotona directors and present head of the foundation that supports the center, the South Bronx Educational Foundation) explains, a way of opening their eyes to the needs of others and instilling positive moral attitudes such as self-control and a spirit of service.

Crotona’s mission

Crotona Center, which arose as an initiative of some faithful of Opus Dei and their friends, is located at 843 Crotona Park North. A few years ago, a generous donation from the UPS company provided for the renovation of the house on that site, which was in poor shape.

Boys between the ages of ten and eighteen take part in the activities at Crotona, eager to improve their academic and human formation. “We’re not here just to provide academic help to the boys, or to offer them entertainment. Our mission is to help them to grow as a person, to be more
demanding on themselves, to do something great with their lives,” said Eddie Llull, activities coordinator for Crotona.

“During one period in my life,” recalls Kevin, a Crotona student, “what I was seeking from my school mates was their attention, not their friendship. Actually I didn’t even know what friendship was. I knew that if I did something crazy in class the others would laugh, and so to feel accepted I did crazy things. In Crotona I learned, especially by experience, that friendship is a relationship based on truth, love, and respect for personal freedom. How has this helped me? Well now, for example, I try to understand my friends as they are and not as I would like them to be. It’s strange, but the better I get to know them, the more I appreciate the good that is in them.”

Sometimes the tutors are the only positive role models the boys have in their lives. It’s not infrequent that the tutors may even come to represent a father figure to them, since families in this neighborhood are often not intact. In any case, the Crotona staff always tries to transmit a positive vision of what the family should be. The boys are encouraged to feel themselves part of an extended family and to think about the needs of others, to be concerned about everyone around them.

At Crotona, the regular activities during the school year are complemented by special programs that take place on Saturdays and in the summer. These include talks with well-known professionals, visits to companies and research centers, etc. Not long ago, the Crotona students, under the direction of an art major, organized an exposition of paintings.

In Brief

Amajari (Brazil) -- Volunteer project in the Amazon region
During ten days of their summer vacation in January 2007, some thirty students and young professionals took part in a program to help families in the village of Trairão, in the Amazon jungle. Trairão has almost 700 inhabitants scattered on small parcels of land. One of the most isolated and needy villages in the area, it forms part of the township of Amajari and is 140 miles from Boa Vista, the capital of the State of Roraima, in the extreme north of Brazil.

The volunteers, who attend formative activities of the Prelature in various cities in Brazil, have worked on the project for months and drawn up a complete program: urgent medical and dental assistance, health and first aid classes, basic notions of computer use and installation of computers, catechism classes for children and adults, and renovation of the village chapel.

As a first step, Pedro Paulo Magalhães, a computer consultant, coordinated a campaign of donations that lasted six months. This raised enough money to purchase three tons of construction material for the chapel, 5,000 doses of medicine, two dental chairs, six computers with printers, an antenna to access the internet, etc. The Ministry of Aviation put a transport plane at their disposal. Airline tickets were also obtained for the students. A family donated the liturgical items needed for the chapel: statues, vestments, altar coverings, and a tabernacle.

The project also had the help of a Cooperator of Opus Dei who is an officer with the Seventh Jungle Infantry Battalion quartered in Boa Vista. He provided vital logistical support, especially in regard to transport of the students and material on the dirt roads through the jungle.

The project was also assisted by Father Michelino Roberto, a priest of the Archdiocese of São Paulo and a Cooperator of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, who celebrated Holy Mass each day and gave catechism classes.

The students were divided into work teams. Under the direction of Doctor Marcio Makoto Nishida, the medical team handled 459 consultations, one emergency birth and an emergency intervention resulting from a work accident. Doctor Rafael Yagüe, professor at the Dental School of the University of São Paulo, with the help of two students took care of
160 dental consultations and gave ten hours of classes on first aid and hygiene, which included the distribution of material for oral hygiene. In the village school, 6 web connected computers were installed and 30 hours of classes on the theory and practice of computer use were provided.

The team in charge of restoring the small village church also worked intensely. The new chapel was inaugurated with the celebration of the Mass of St. Josemaría attended by all the families in the village. At the end, everyone sang the Salve Rainha [Hail Holy Queen] before a statue of our Lady.

The residents of Trairão gave the students the best that they had: fish, poultry, and fruit. The volunteers had the satisfaction of being able to help the most needy. As one of the students, Leonardo Sakuramoto, said on his return to the São Paulo airport: “I've never worked so hard in my life, but this was the best vacation I've ever had.”

Bodjondè (Togo) -- The Takeli Foundation: Inauguration of a new school

The Takeli Foundation came to birth in Granada, Spain, in 2005. It’s founder, Raymond Dyssyrama Takeli, who lives in Spain, is from Bodjondé, a small Togolese township with 1900 inhabitants. The object of the foundation is to help educate the children of the township.

The foundation has already constructed a primary school and a secondary institute, and has paid the tuition for 451 children. Each student costs annually the equivalent of six dollars, something which, although it seems incredible to Raymond’s Granadan friends, is out of the reach of the people living in Bodjondé. Thanks to donations from several companies, scholarly and sporting material has been provided to the children: notebooks, pencils, schoolbags, and even jerseys and soccer balls.

“I was born into a very large family, with 23 brothers and sisters,” Takeli explained in an interview. “And this left a deep impression on me. But the starting point, the match that ignited the whole idea was a letter I
received in Granada from one of my sisters in January 2005. Two of her daughters had been expelled from school because they could not pay the tuition. This made me very sad, since here I was a privileged Togolese living in Granada, with a wonderful wife and two clever girls. My salary as a French teacher does not leave a lot left over, but I decided to do something. Besides, I am a supernumerary of Opus Dei, and have heard many times about the responsibility Christians have in the area of social justice.”

He began by explaining to his own students what six dollars could mean in the African jungle. “One of them said to me: ‘Messié, I can pay for three tuitions.’ And another: ‘As for me, five’ and another; ‘Me, one.’ And another: ‘I'm going to talk to my father.’ And so we began. Later some friends helped me to set up the foundation.”

The motto of the foundation is: “Help, yes. Education, more.” It has received help from commercial firms and public corporations such as the University of Granada, and above all from many individuals. For example, it has been helped by many students and also fathers and mothers at the Mulhacen School (where Raymond teaches), as well as those at other schools.

In 2006, thanks to donations from various entities, a school, a pharmacy (to which boxes of medicine are sent periodically from Spain), and a well to provide clean water began functioning in Bodjondé. On May 28 a secondary school with four classrooms was inaugurated.
Professor Mercatili showed them the historic water clock of Pincio, then in the process of restoration. (In June, after it had been repaired, it was restored to its traditional place in the Villa Borghese gardens.)

He explained to them the circumstances that gave rise to the watch making school back in the 70's, due to the prompting of a professional association in that field.

Epifani and his wife also visited the facilities for the industrial and engineering students. Before leaving they had lunch, prepared by the SAFI school of hospitality services at ELIS.

Dreistetten (Austria) -- Priests' Meeting in Tagungshaus Hohewand

The yearly conference for priests and seminarians organized by Hohewand Conference Center in Dreistetten, Lower Austria, was held on May 28-29. The theme of the conference was “Benedict XVI: his life, theology, and pontificate.” This topic reflected the approaching visit of the Pope to Austria in September on the occasion of the 850th anniversary of the Shrine of Mariazell.

On Tuesday the 29th, Opus Dei's Regional Vicar for Austria, Msgr. Martin Schlag, spoke about the theological itinerary of Josef Ratzinger. Later, Auxiliary Bishop Franz Lackner of Graz, explained the significance of the Holy Father’s visit to Mariazell in September.

The conference was an opportunity to penetrate more deeply into the teachings of the Pope and to prepare spiritually for his upcoming visit.

Abidjan (Ivory Coast) -- Project Wassa
Project Wassa is a medical and social service initiative started by students and young doctors through the Association pour le Développement Social et Culturel (ADESC).

Those involved are students of the Health Sciences and medical interns. The majority take part in the formational activities offered by the Comoë Cultural Center. The target area for the project is Wassa, a suburb of Abidjan that is lacking in any health infrastructure.

The inhabitants of Wassa come from all regions of the Ivory Coast and also from neighboring countries: Burkina-Faso, Mali, Ghana, Togo, Senegal, Mauritania. The living conditions in the shanties of the neighborhood are quite precarious. The only work available for the men is as cooks or caretakers in the houses of nearby areas. Some women carry out small commercial activities (selling cold water, bread, etc.) to help support their family.

Project Wassa began in June 2006. Every Saturday the volunteers go to Wassa to look after “their friends” (as they call their patients, with whom they have a very cordial relationship). The return home, at the end of the session, is usually delayed because often there are more patients than time available to care for them.

Each session involves five types of activity: informing patients about the sicknesses they are exposed to, checking blood pressure, temperature, etc., consultations, caring for injuries (especially of children), and distributing medications. The average number of patients is 68 per session. The number of doctors and students who help out varies between 15 and 20.

During the first sessions the most common illnesses found were intestinal infections, salmonella, malaria and scabies. These are all sicknesses that stem from the unhealthy environment and lack of hygienic facilities. This fact moved those in charge to insist on preventive measures, since it would be useless to give medicine if nothing was done to prevent the infections from returning. What proved very effective was making large posters explaining how to avoid these sicknesses and stressing the importance of cleanliness.

The project has been a wonderful experience for everyone. It enables students to put into practice what they learn at school, and above all to
appreciate the responsibility of putting their time, energy and knowledge generously at the disposition of the needy.

Rome (Italy) -- Pastry and volunteering

A pastry competition was held in the Arcogrande Club for a group of Rome’s teenage girls. Some were more expert at baking, others less so. But all at least wanted to learn. For those with less experience, recipes were provided for possible products.

Prizes were given for the most appetizing pastry, as well as for the most original and the most elaborate one. Overcoming their natural inclination to consume the pastries, the girls brought them to the Dono di Maria, a “soup kitchen” near St. Peter’s Basilica. Their pastries, and above all their friendliness, provided an agreeable interlude for the homeless people who patronize the establishment.

Activities in the Arcogrande Club include classes in Christian formation, sports, and volunteer work. With regard to the latter, a very popular program is one that provides help to the aged on Sunday afternoons, twice a month.

Kreuzweingarten (Germany) -- A symposium on domestic finances

In the face of the challenge of strengthening families and sound customs in society, on June 2, 2007, a cycle of conferences for specialists in the field of domestic finances was held. Those invited included professionals in this field and representatives of some German associations that promote work in the home.

Kristin Schlegel-Matties, a professor at the University of Paderborn; Heide Steiger, a businesswoman; Anette Brammer, a high school teacher;
and Dörte Folkers, from the German Food Association, were among the speakers. Their presentations covered quite varied topics but all had a common denominator: the importance of family life and work in the home, and of the need for society to recognize this.

The talks focussed on the urgent need to construct a society favorable to the family, making it easier to harmonize the professional work of women with their tasks as mothers and educators. Heide Steiger spoke about a consulting program being offered to companies that wanted to help their employees combine a demanding professional work with attention to their families. The experience here has been very positive. To the extent that a company takes into account the family obligations of its employees and provides specific solutions (more flexible hours, the possibility of leaving the children in a company nursery, etc.), a relationship of trust is developed which also improves the quality of employees’ work.

Paris (France) -- The Church in the face of violence

“The Church in the face of violence” was the topic of a study workshop for priests held in Paris at the parish of St. François de Molitor, on March 12.

The morning conference was given by Jean-Luc Chabot, a professor of Political Science at the University of Grenoble. He emphasized how the universal and constant reality of violence in human history began to mitigate with the appearance of Christianity, and how the de-Christianization of the West is not irrelevant to the return of violence that recent years have seen. Referring to the ideas of the anthropologist René Girard, he stressed that Christianity brings with it a principle of pacification. Jesus carried out the great reconciliation of mankind with God and with one’s fellow men. Therefore the great peace-makers of our day are those who extend the action of Christ, especially priests through the Sacrament of Penance.
In the afternoon session, Jean-Marie Petitclerc, a Salesian priest specializing in the education of young people in poor areas, spoke about television and video games as factors generating gratuitous violence nowadays. He said that these widespread pastimes lead to confusing an imaginary world in which others' suffering is hard to perceive, with reality. It is important to warn young people of this danger and help them choose worthwhile entertainment. At the same time, personal and collective violence would diminish greatly if young people, especially when encountering failure in their aspirations, feel themselves more valued by adults. Often, he pointed out, violence is a way of affirming one's personality in a world that seems uncaring.

Sydney (Australia) -- "You shall be my witnesses"

Creston College and the Eremeran Hills Club organized a workshop for university girls and young professional women in preparation for World Youth Day 2008. The aim was to study the Pope’s message for the gathering, which has as its motto some words of our Lord: “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

Those taking part also attended the ceremonies of the Easter Triduum. They dedicated time to adoration during the Holy Thursday vigil and participated in some study sessions on the World Youth Day themes: the Cross, service, volunteering, apostolate, and prayer.

These sessions were interactive, with everyone taking part. During the session on the Holy Cross, the young women wrote down their own reflections on stations of the Way of the Cross. A number of them commented that this exercise had deepened their understanding of the Easter mystery. The study session that followed a class on prayer included the development of a guide to teach groups of different ages how to pray. Finally, during the seminar on service, the participants, divided into groups, suggested various solidarity projects that could be carried out in Sydney.
At the end everyone expressed eagerness to help out during World Youth Day.

Montevideo (Uruguay) -- Making good use of summer

The Del Mar University Residence will celebrate its fortieth anniversary this October. During the summer months of 2007, the students who frequent the residence have been deeply involved in three activities of “solidarity” with those less fortunate than themselves.

From January 26 to 31, a group of twenty-five young women dedicated themselves to the maintenance and improvement of the facilities of CADI in the Casavalle district, on the outskirts of Montevideo. CADI, which is the Spanish acronym for the Center for the Integral Development of Women, was begun fifteen years ago by university women who take part in the activities of the Del Mar residence. Although renovation work is underway, at present a cargo-container CADI is using as a classroom will have to continue providing its services. The major project for the young women was to provide thermal insulation to keep the room cool during summer and warm in winter. Another project was painting the doors of the rooms and the playground equipment. On the final day a celebration was organized for forty children from the neighborhood.

The Uruguayan community of Pueblo Garzon once had a population of 2,000 but is now down to 600. In its more prosperous days, Garzon had four stores, a pharmacy, six shops, seven blacksmith’s workshops, four hairdressers, and a train that stopped four times a day. Now almost the only source of income is a luxury hotel which tries to attract Argentinean and Brazilian vacationers looking for peace and quiet. But what moved a group of students from Del Mar Residence to spend the first to the fifth of March in Pueblo Garzon was not the need to rest, but the desire to do something for others. The university women gave classes in first aid and dental hygiene, painted the rooms in a school, and offered talks on human virtues.
Salinas, some 25 miles from Montevideo, is one of the numerous seaside resorts on the Uruguayan coast. From March first to the fifth, 25 girls from the Casavalle district, almost all students of CADI, spent a few days in Salinas with people from Del Mar residence. Besides having a good time, they received an intense program of talks on human and Christian formation. They also found time to visit with residents at a home for the aged in the area.

Bogotá (Colombia) -- Introductory Program for Family Orientation Moderators

Societal pressure against the family can be very strong at times. Some young Colombian couples concerned about this situation decided to develop centers for family orientation. These centers offer courses on raising children and marital relationships, using the case method of instruction.

The aim of these courses is to help the participating couples to focus the education of their children in a milieu of friendship; and, through the study of practical cases, to discover the richness of family life for the growth of each person.

With this goal in mind, in March the Introductory Program for Family Orientation Moderators was organized in Bogotá. 63 couples from different cities throughout the country took part. The course was given by Professor Luis Carreras from the Family Development Program in Barcelona, Spain, which has been active in working with families since 1968.

Those taking part in the program gained experience in the use of case methods in family orientation and became acquainted with the general structure of the family orientation programs.

The sponsors of the initiative are involved in discussions with the Barcelona organization to provide these courses all over Colombia.
Madrid (Spain) -- Mozart for Mexico

On January 27 a benefit concert was held in Madrid for a work camp being carried out by students from Colegio Mayor Moncloa, a student residence in Madrid, in Tlapa, Mexico. The concert celebrated the 250th anniversary of Mozart’s birth. It was presented by the Chorus of Madrid’s Polytechnic University and the Academic Orchestra of Madrid.

Work camps have been organized by the Colegio Mayor Moncloa since 1983 in Poland, Rumania, Russia, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Argentina, and Mexico. The camps carry out social projects that often involve constructing or renovating schools, homes and churches, and providing classes for children and adults and various community services, in collaboration with local institutions.

Situated in the Guerrero Mountains of southwestern Mexico, Tlapa has grown in a chaotic way around a 16th century monastery, which is now a cathedral. It is an extremely poor community and the situation is even worse in the areas outside the city.

During the last work camp in Tlapa, the volunteers from Moncloa constructed three classroom buildings in the communities of San Isidro and La Angostura, staffed a summer school in San Isidro (for 40 children) and another at the clinic of the ONG MAS (80 children), visited and provided various types of service to more than 60 needy families in the district, and worked in projects of cleaning and hygiene in the San Nicolas valley and in La Hacienda.

Mexico City (Mexico) -- Mediterranean ports

The Advanced Institute for Institutional Administration of the Pan-American University is a pioneering initiative in Mexico in the field of hospitality. The Federal Government has entrusted it with various training projects at the national level. It offers instruction leading to an academic
degree (licentiate) and various types of diplomas. Course offerings are quite varied and range from the administration of service enterprises to personnel development and management.

An annual event is the Muestra Gastronomica (Gastronomic Exhibit), held each year with a special theme. In 2007 the theme was “The Mediterranean Seaports: Greece, Morocco, Algiers, Egypt, and Turkey.” The ambassadors of Algiers, Egypt and Morocco participated in the event, whose preparation included research into the culture, economy and society of these countries carried out by the licentiate students.
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 2007

In the first half of 2006, 295 faithful of the Prelature and 11 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.

To read the full version of Romana, you can subscribe to the print edition.

[1] In Romana 42 we failed to include José Carrascosa Fernández, who died on June 30, 2006.

Back to Contents
A study
The Church’s Mission and Temporal Realities

Antonio Miralles
School of Theology
Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

I. Introductory remarks

By the “mission of the Church,” we mean the goal towards which its activity is directed. This includes not only the ultimate realities that will come about with the glorious second coming of Christ and the final resurrection, but also temporal realities, proper to the present time of the Church journeying towards its definitive homeland. The Church’s Magisterium speaks of “making the Christian spirit a vital energizing force in temporal realities,”[1] while also using the equivalent expression “earthly realities,”[2] or simply “the world.”

The Church’s mission is the responsibility of all the faithful, without excluding anyone. As the Second Vatican Council taught: “The Lord Jesus, ‘whom the Father has sent into the world’ (Jn 10:36), has made his whole Mystical Body a sharer in the anointing of the Spirit with which he himself is anointed. In him all the faithful are made a holy and royal priesthood....Therefore, there is no member who does not have a part in the mission of the whole Body.”[3] However, in the carrying out of this mission a diversity of functions exists within the organic unity of the whole people of God. Thus it would be a mistake to consider the fulfillment of the Church’s mission, directed both to the eternal salvation of mankind and to temporal realities, as the activity of only a certain category of persons in the Church, whether they be sacred ministers, laity, or religious.

2. Guidelines in Sacred Scripture

With regard to the Church’s mission, the New Testament has nothing explicit to say about temporal or earthly realities, or the social order. However, it often speaks about the world, which it calls the cosmos, understood first of all as the dwelling place of mankind, the setting for history.[4]
St. Paul insists that all created realities are good,[5] but that the world is at present subject to the negative power of sin and opposes itself to God.[6] Nevertheless, this negative judgment on the world, although frequent, is not absolute, since the world is the object of the redemption worked by Christ: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Christians are in the world and are not called to leave it[7] but to spread light in it.[8]

The realities of this world include “the social order,” with its essential element of public authority. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, gives specific advice regarding the respect and obedience Christians owe to authorities.[9] At first glance this might seem like a program of socio-political ultraconservatism, of full conformity to the system. But on closer consideration, St. Paul’s advice points Christians towards a mission that is truly transformational. Although recognizing temporal motivations, he repeatedly states that submission to authority responds to the order established by God: it should be lived in the presence of God, because it is a question of conscience. To obey the civil authority and pay taxes is to obey and pay a servant of God. The social order is transformed, not by the direct action of the Christian community on social structures, but by introducing a new spirit through the consistent Christian action of the faithful. In other passages of the Pauline letters, elements of the social order are seen as being transformed in the same way: the relationship between spouses;[10] the condition of slaves;[11] the value of riches;[12] social peace;[13] the value of work.[14] The first letter of St. Peter offers a parallel teaching.[15]

Although his main concern is the question of mankind’s salvation, St. Paul also gives an overview of the present situation of the material world, highlighting its participation in the destiny of redeemed mankind.[16] When the glorious resurrection of the body takes place, material creation will also be freed from decay and corruption and come to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.[17] The horizon here is that of the end times, rather than a mission St. Paul is pointing to for present-day Christians in respect to the material world.

3. First doctrinal statements on the Church’s mission regarding temporal realities
It was only in the twentieth century that the Church’s mission in the face of earthly realities became the object of specific theological reflection. In this area of doctrine, life has far outstripped theology. A faith incarnated in life led to the profound social and cultural transformations produced by the Christianization of the ancient world, whether of Imperial Rome and other neighboring lands in the Church's first centuries, or of the Germanic, Slavic and other peoples in the following centuries. But neither the Fathers of the Church nor medieval and modern theologians showed much interest in this theological topic.\[18\]

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII's concern over the de-Christianization of many sectors of civil society spurred him to publish a series of encyclicals on specific aspects of the social and political order, among them, the well-known \textit{Rerum Novarum} (May 15, 1891). Although this encyclical does not contain a systematic teaching on the Church's mission regarding temporal realities, it does emphasize in several places the Church's beneficent influence in this area, even though her immediate aim is the salvation of souls.\[19\] The same is true regarding the social teachings of successive Pontiffs. Until the Second Vatican Council, one fails to find in the Magisterium a general and systematic exposition of the Church’s mission in relation to temporal realities.

The reflection of theologians on this question started to bear more mature fruit towards the middle of the twentieth century.\[20\] It began to be recognized that temporal realities enter into the divine plan of salvation, and that in order to understand them correctly one had to confront the question of who man is. The need was seen to distinguish between the spiritual and temporal planes, but there were many different ways of focusing this distinction. One point of agreement was the duty of the Magisterium to illumine the right ordering of earthly realities in so far as they are part of the divine plan. There also arose a common conviction that the laity were the protagonists in any effective search for that order. The idea of the \textit{consecratio mundi} began to spread. Pius XII employed this expression when stressing that the \textit{consecratio mundi} is essentially the responsibility of the laity.\[21\] However, the precise meaning of this expression remained open to clarification; there was also a lack of agreement on the continuity or discontinuity between the present world
and the future Kingdom, with different solutions regarding the value of human activity in time.

This was not only a question of theological reflection, which, even though important, would not be effective unless it was translated into specific deeds by the faithful. Decisive in this respect was the fact that many Catholics—individually or in collaboration with others—undertook in a spirit of faith actions directed towards perfecting temporal realities. With eyes of faith, we can see here the impulse of the Holy Spirit, who animates the life of the Church. Given the journal in which this article is being published, I would like to consider briefly the spiritual message and activity of St. Josemaría Escrivá, and its repercussion on this area of the Church’s mission.

The goal of the Church’s mission in regard to temporal realities and the path to attain it are summed up in one of the points of his well-known book *The Way*, published in 1939: “I'll tell you a secret, an open secret: these world crises are crises of saints. God wants a handful of men ‘of his own’ in every human activity. Then... pax Christi in regno Christi—the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ.”[22] In God’s plan, every human activity should be recapitulated and united in Christ,[23] and St. Josemaría insisted that this would come about through faithful who are themselves united to Christ, docile to his action. This is understood in the context of professional work, as we see in another point from the same book: “In order that he [Christ] may reign in the world, it is necessary to have people of prestige who, with their eyes fixed on heaven, dedicate themselves to all human activities, and through those activities exercise quietly—and effectively—an apostolate of a professional character.”[24]

As a result of St. Josemaría’s teaching, men and women of every walk of life and social class took up the mission of sanctifying their daily activities. Thus the theology of the Church’s mission in relation to temporal realities became a theology incarnated in the life of ordinary Christians, as he explained to members of Opus Dei: “United with Christ through prayer and mortification in our daily work, in the thousand human circumstances of our simple life as ordinary Christians, we will work the miracle of placing all things at the feet of our Lord lifted up on the Cross, on which he has allowed himself to be nailed because he so loves the world and us human
beings...work is for us not only our natural means of meeting financial needs and maintaining ourselves in a reasonable and simple community of life with other people, but also—and above all—the specific means of personal sanctification that God our Father has indicated to us, and the great apostolic and sanctifying instrument that God has put in our hands to make the order that he wants shine forth in all of creation.”[25] On the eve of the Second Vatican Council, thousands of men and women all over the world were thus carrying out the Church’s mission to restore the order of temporal realities.[26]

4. Teaching of the Second Vatican Council

In the second chapter of the decree Apostolicam Actuositatem, the Council provides a systematic, although brief, teaching on the Church’s mission, also in regard to temporal realities. This systematic exposition provides the framework needed to assimilate the other teachings of the Council on this topic.

a) The two spheres of the Church’s mission

The chapter begins with a clear statement of the Church’s mission, grounded on the mission of Christ. “The work of Christ’s redemption concerns essentially the salvation of men; it takes in also, however, the renewal of the whole temporal order. The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring men the message and grace of Christ but also to permeate and improve the whole range of the temporal” (AA 5). The mission of the Church continues that of Christ, as he himself said in his prayer to the Father: “As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (Jn 17:18); and later he told his disciples on the day of his resurrection: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21). Thus Christ’s work of redemption determines the content of the Church’s mission. This work encompasses two areas of activity: on the one hand, the salvation of mankind; on the other, the restoration of the whole temporal order. Corresponding to the first is the work of bringing Christ’s message and grace to mankind. The second involves imbuing and perfecting the order of temporal realities with the spirit of the Gospel.
The restoration of the whole temporal order towards which the work of Christ’s redemption also points will be fully realized at the end of the world. Here we speak of restoration in the terminology of Ephesians 1:10, in accord with the Vulgate translation (**instaurare omnia in Christo, quae in caelis et quae in terra sunt**). In the Neovulgate, the verb **recapitulare** is used, to better express the multiple shades of meaning of the Greek verb: to reassume, to sum up, to begin anew, to renew, to group under a single head (recent English versions use “unite”). Already now, while the Church is journeying on earth, this restoration has begun, and the Church's duty is to imbue and perfect temporal realities with the Gospel spirit.

The two channels of the Church’s mission do not run in parallel, as though independent of one another. Rather the Conciliar document stresses the unity between the spiritual and temporal orders while distinguishing between them: “These orders are distinct; they are nevertheless so closely linked that God’s plan is, in Christ, to take the whole world up again and make of it a new creation, in an initial way here on earth, in full realization at the end of time” (AA 5). The link between the two orders comes from God’s plan to restore the whole world in Christ.

b) **Unity of mission and diversity of action**

“The Church was founded to spread the kingdom of Christ over all the earth for the glory of God the Father, to make all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them to establish the right relationship of the entire world to Christ” (AA 2). “The apostolate of the Church therefore, and of each of its members, aims primarily at announcing to the world by word and action the message of Christ and communicating to it the grace of Christ” (AA 6). This urgent task is the responsibility of all the faithful, but the ministry of those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders takes on a special role here: “The principal means of bringing this about is the ministry of the word and of the sacraments. Committed in a special way to the clergy, it leaves room however for a highly important part for the laity” (AA 6). The special role of the sacred ministers does not make the role of the laity marginal: “It is in this sphere most of all that the lay apostolate and the pastoral ministry complete each other” (AA 6).
As regards the diverse modality of action of the faithful in relation to temporal realities, the Conciliar text stresses that the Church fulfills its mission of leading the whole world to Christ by means of men and women who have been made sharers in the redemption. The first protagonists of this duty are the faithful, rather than the Church as an institution. When one speaks of the Church as an institution, the role of the pastors moves into first place, while, with respect to the building up of the temporal order, the pastors take second place. As the Conciliar decree clearly explains: “It is the work of the entire Church to fashion men able to establish the proper scale of values in the temporal order and direct it towards God through Christ. Pastors have the duty to set forth clearly the principles concerning the purpose of creation and the use to be made of the world, and to provide moral and spiritual helps for the renewal of the temporal order in Christ” (AA 7). With respect to the laity, the text continues: “Laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order, guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church; prompted by Christian love, they should act in this domain in a direct way and in their own specific manner” (AA 7).

In this regard, the pastoral constitution Gaudium et Spes offers an eloquent call: “This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation...The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation” (GS 43). This exhortation is addressed to all Catholics, but it clearly holds special relevance for the lay faithful.

The perfecting of the temporal order is the work of all mankind, not only of the faithful of the Church. Moreover, it cannot be carried out by a Christian in isolation. Since man is social by nature, the participation of all men and women is needed. “As citizens they must cooperate with other citizens with their own particular skill and on their own responsibility. Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice of God’s kingdom”
Although the faithful are not working in the name of the Church here, their action has an ecclesial value in so far as it is carried out by members of Christ, sharers in his royal priesthood, guided by the Holy Spirit, and therefore benefiting the entire Church through the communion of saints.

**c) The content of the Church’s mission in regard to temporal realities**

The Conciliar decree sums up the content of the Church’s mission in regard to temporal realities with these words: “to permeate and improve the whole range of the temporal [with the Gospel spirit]” (AA 5). But it also uses other equivalent formulations: “to establish the proper scale of values in the temporal order and direct it towards God through Christ” (AA 7); “making the Christian spirit a vital energizing force in the temporal sphere” (AA 4).

The decree goes on to list the realities that make up the temporal order: “the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations, and other matters of this kind, as well as their development and progress” (AA 7). Therefore these are the realities that have to be imbued with the Gospel spirit, with a Christian spirit.

Earthly realities become an object of the Church’s mission not as a final end, but as an intermediate one. Nevertheless, they have a value and consistency of their own. The decree insists that these realities “not only aid in the attainment of man’s ultimate goal but also possess their own intrinsic value. This value has been established in them by God, whether they are considered in themselves or as parts of the whole temporal order. ‘God saw that all he had made was very good’ (Gen 1:31). This natural goodness of theirs takes on a special dignity as a result of their relation to the human person, for whose service they were created. It has pleased God to unite all things, both natural and supernatural, in Christ Jesus ‘so that in all things he may have the first place’ (Col 1:18). This destination, however, not only does not deprive the temporal order of its independence, its proper goals, laws, supports, and significance for human welfare, but rather perfects the temporal order in its own intrinsic strength and worth and puts it on a level with man’s whole vocation upon earth” (AA 7). Respect for the values intrinsic to temporal realities requires of the laity an adequate formation. As
the Council teaches in *Gaudium et Spes*: “Secular duties and activities belong properly although not exclusively to laymen. Therefore acting as citizens in the world, whether individually or socially, they will keep the laws proper to each discipline, and labor to equip themselves with a genuine expertise in their various fields” (GS 43).

But what does it mean to permeate the whole temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel? For a full answer, we can turn to *Gaudium et Spes*, specifically to Chapter 4 of the first part, on the task of the Church in the contemporary world. Confronting the Church’s mission, the pastoral constitution affirms: “Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church does not only communicate divine life to men but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth, most of all by its healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the person, by the way in which it strengthens the seams of human society and imbues the everyday activity of men with a deeper meaning and importance” (GS 40). The following three paragraphs (41, 42, and 43) show how the Church perfects these three aspects of the temporal order: the dignity of the human person, the ordering of society, and mankind’s daily activity. [27] The Church does not limit itself to communicating divine life; it’s efforts are also directed to the perfecting of temporal realities—not as a parallel action but in such a way that the communication of divine life in itself contributes in great measure to such perfecting.

—Healing and elevating of human dignity

The healing and elevating of human dignity that the Church fosters is oriented above all to the individual. The Church opens up “to man at the same time the meaning of his own existence, that is, the innermost truth about himself...For man will always yearn to know, at least in an obscure way, what is the meaning of his life, of his activity, of his death” (GS 41). Questions about the meaning of one’s life, actions and death touch on the individual in a special way. The answer that comes from God has a universal value and the Church offers it to everyone, but each person perceives it as a response to his or her most intimate desires.

The Council stresses the Church’s commitment to “the great value of these things: the human person with his freedom and bodily life”[28] And it
defends the Church’s right to “to pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it” (GS 76). Similarly it invites the laity “also by their combined efforts [to] remedy the customs and conditions of the world, if they are an inducement to sin, so that they all may be conformed to the norms of justice and may favor the practice of virtue rather than hinder it. By so doing they will imbue culture and human activity with genuine moral values.”[29]

—Strengthening the ordering of human society

Gaudium et Spes stresses that human society is called to form a strong unity, like that of a family. “God, who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (GS 24). “For having been created in the image of God, Who ‘from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth’ (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself” (GS 24). The unity of all mankind could seem a utopian proposal if one considers the whole of human history, made up of continual conflicts and wars and offenses against human dignity. Nevertheless, God’s plan in the end will be fully realized. God does not fail. He himself, through the incarnation of his Son, has established the irrevocable foundation for this plan and provided the unfailing dynamism needed for its fulfillment.

Christ had formed the community of those who believe in him, that is to say, the Church, as the family of God. [30] Therefore one can understand why paragraph 42, in seeking to explain how the Church strengthens the ordering of human society, begins with this affirmation: “The union of the human family is greatly fortified and fulfilled by the unity, founded on Christ, of the family of God’s children” (GS 42). Therefore the Church fulfills this aspect of its mission by building itself up as God’s family.

The Church does not infuse the spirit of family unity into human society as though from without. “The Church recognizes that worthy elements are found in today’s social movements, especially an evolution toward unity...The promotion of unity belongs to the innermost nature of the Church, for she is, ‘thanks to her relationship with Christ, a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the
unity of the whole human race" (GS 42).

The proper end of the Church is of a religious nature. “But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law” (GS 42). “Thus [the Church] shows the world that an authentic union, social and external, results from a union of minds and hearts, namely from that faith and charity by which her own unity is unbreakably rooted in the Holy Spirit. For the force which the Church can inject into the modern society of man consists in that faith and charity put into vital practice, not in any external dominion exercised by merely human means” (GS 42).

The Council also stresses the role that the Church’s universality plays in fostering the unity of mankind: “Moreover, since in virtue of her mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system, the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations, provided these trust her and truly acknowledge her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission” (GS 42). “For this reason, the Church admonishes her own sons, but also humanity as a whole, to overcome all strife between nations and races in this family spirit of God’s children, and in the same way, to give internal strength to human associations which are just” (GS 42).

—Introducing a deeper meaning and significance into human activity

How the Church fosters a deeper meaning and significance in the daily activity of men and women is the topic of Chapter 3 of Gaudium et Spes. “For man, created to God’s image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth” (GS 34). The following sentences goes on to specify: “This mandate concerns the whole of everyday activity as well. For while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way which appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the
Creator’s work, consulting the advantages of their brother men, and are contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan” (GS 34). Here we see clearly the deep significance of the everyday activity of men and women.

“Human activity, to be sure, takes its significance from its relationship to man. Just as it proceeds from man, so it is ordered towards man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has. Similarly, all that men do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, a more humane disposition of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about” (GS 35).

But the shadows produced by sin are also very real, and therefore men have to resist the “spirit of vanity and malice which transforms into an instrument of sin those human energies intended for the service of God and man” (GS 37). As a result, “all human activity, constantly imperiled by man’s pride and deranged self-love, must be purified and perfected by the power of Christ’s cross and resurrection” (GS 37). Christ “cautions them...that this charity is not something to be reserved for important matters, but must be pursued chiefly in the ordinary circumstances of life. Undergoing death itself for all of us sinners, he taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who search after peace and justice” (GS 38).

Thus the Church’s mission, insofar as it concerns the introduction of a greater significance into the activity of men and women, cannot be restricted to the act of teaching but also requires the communication of divine life, principally through the sacraments, in order to second the action of Christ, who “works in the hearts of men through the power of his Spirit.” Through docility to Christ’s action, the laity can fulfill their part in this aspect of the Church’s mission. “It is generally the function of the well-formed Christian conscience [of the laity] to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city. For guidance and spiritual strength
let them turn to the clergy” (GS 43), receiving doctrinal orientation and the
impulse of divine life communicated through the sacraments.

Thus the laity can carry out their activity in the temporal order with an
authentic sense of mission: “By their competence in secular training and by
their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them
vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by
human labor, technical skill, and civic culture for the benefit of all men
according to the design of the Creator and the light of his Word. May the
goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all men, and may
they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and
Christian freedom” (LG 36).

The laity in their fulfillment of the Church’s mission not only
contribute effectively to the right ordering of temporal realities but also
elevate them to a higher level, as part of their spiritual worship of God: “For
all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and
family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if
carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently
borne—all these become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through
Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord’s Body,
they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as
those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world
itself to God. One thus reaches the most genuine meaning of the consecratio
mundi, the meaning which results from union with the sacrifice of Christ”
(LG 34).

5. After the Council

a) Incarnating Vatican II’s teachings

St. Josemaría Escrivá, who from the end of the twenties had worked
tirelessly to spur ordinary Catholics to take up their responsibility in the
Church’s mission to leaven temporal realities, accepted with great joy all the
Council’s teachings. He saw there a confirmation of a fundamental part of
the spirit of Opus Dei: the sanctification of ordinary work.[32] “Sanctity, for
the vast majority of men, implies sanctifying their work, sanctifying
themselves in it, and sanctifying others through it. Thus they can encounter
God in the course of their daily lives.”[33] He speaks here not only of
sanctifying oneself in one’s work and sanctifying others through it, but also of sanctifying the work itself. Thus we see an effective contribution to the task of informing and perfecting temporal realities with a Christian spirit. He fostered among men and women of all walks of life and social classes, all over the world, the effective translation into life of what the Council had taught with such richness of doctrine.\[34]\n
Through the efforts of the faithful of Opus Dei and many other Christians, individually or grouped in various ecclesial realities, the Council’s teaching is little by little bearing fruit in a true restoration of the temporal order. This effort has been accompanied by theological reflection and by documents from the Church’s Magisterium that highlight the Council’s teaching and also provide new light on certain points. For the Church experiences “a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts, through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth.”\[35]\n
Doctrine and life go hand in hand. We will now turn to some statements from the Papal Magisterium that shed new light on the Council’s teaching.

\[36\]b) The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975) of Pope Paul VI, issued ten years after the conclusion of Vatican II, sums up the mission of the Church as one of evangelization.\[36\] This mission looks not only to individual men and women but also to humanity as a whole, which needs to be transformed through the transformation of individuals.\[37\] It is a deeply-penetrating action that involves “affecting and transforming, through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgment, values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation” (EN 19). A transformation of this type will have obvious repercussions on the order of temporal realities.

The salvation that evangelization offers to all men and women is not restricted to the framework of temporal existence. Rather it is a transcendent, eschatological reality that finds its fulfillment in communion
with God. The Pope goes on to explain how the advancement of humanity, seen as liberation and development, is included in this picture, while warning against a reductive view of liberation. While making clear that the Church's mission is not limited to the religious sphere but also has reference to the temporal problems of mankind, the Pope reaffirms that the announcement of salvation in Jesus Christ is the first priority. “The Church links human liberation and salvation in Jesus Christ, but she never identifies them” (EN 35). Liberation understood solely as temporal, political liberation, is not the Gospel concept of liberation: “The Church has the firm conviction that all temporal liberation, all political liberation—even if it endeavors to find its justification in such or such a page of the Old or New Testament, even if it claims for its ideological postulates and its norms of action theological data and conclusions, even if it pretends to be today’s theology—carries within itself the germ of its own negation and fails to reach the ideal that it proposes for itself whenever its profound motives are not those of justice in charity, whenever its zeal lacks a truly spiritual dimension and whenever its final goal is not salvation and happiness in God” (EN 35). Liberation theologies of a temporal mold are thus disqualified at their root.

c) The apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici

The decree Apostolicam Actuositatem on the apostolate of the laity was the Council document that expressed in the most organic way the teaching on the Church’s mission. It was expected that John Paul II’s post-synodal exhortation Christifideles Laici (December 30, 1988) would go more deeply into this teaching, especially in regard to temporal realities. And this is indeed what happened.

According to Gaudium et Spes, the Church includes the world in its mission because it finds itself immersed in the world. The Council’s language leads us to understand that this is not simply a sociological reality. Christifideles Laici focuses on this point and clarifies the secular dimension of the Church, which in a particular way defines the theological and ecclesial condition of the laity. “Certainly all the members of the Church are sharers in this secular dimension but in different ways. In particular the sharing of the lay faithful has its own manner of realization and function, which, according to the Council, is ‘properly and particularly’ theirs. Such a
manner is designated with the expression ‘secular character’[41]…. The “world” thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ…. The lay faithful, in fact, ‘are called by God so that they, led by the spirit of the Gospel, might contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially in this way of life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they manifest Christ to others.’[42] Therefore, for the lay faithful, to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well.”[43]

In various places in the document, John Paul II points to a consequence of fundamental importance: the unity of life needed for the laity to fulfill their mission within temporal realities. First of all, it is seen in the context of the search for holiness in one’s professional and social life: “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities…. ‘The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ’[44]” (CFL 17).

Further on in the document, the need for unity of life in carrying out the new evangelization is stressed, in order to prevent any split between the Gospel and life: “Their [the laity’s] responsibility, in particular, is to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response—consciously perceived and stated by all in varying degrees—to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society. This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel” (CFL 34),

The need for unity of life is also considered in the context of formation: “the lay faithful must be formed according to the union which exists from
their being members of the Church and citizens of human society. There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual’ life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful’s lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the ‘places in time’ where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others” (CFL 59).

*Christifideles Laici* is in continuity with GS 40 in affirming that the Church’s mission to further the salvation of all men and women has repercussions on the temporal order: “Having received the responsibility of manifesting to the world the mystery of God that shines forth in Jesus Christ, the Church likewise reveals the meaning of man to man, the meaning of each person’s existence, opening to each the whole truth about one’s life and final destiny” (CFL 36). The document goes on to highlight important aspects of this revelation of the “meaning of man to man,” making clear the central role of the laity: “the inviolable dignity of every human person” (§ 37); “the inviolability of human life” (§ 38); “the right of freedom of conscience and religious freedom” (§ 39); “the married couple and the family” as “the first and basic expression of the social dimension of the person” (§ 40); “charity towards one’s neighbor” (§ 41); “participation of all in public life” (§ 42); “the socio-economic question, which depends on the organization of work” (§ 43); “the creation and the transmission of culture” (§ 44).

Placing man at the center of the restoration of the temporal order does not mean ignoring the material world. As John Paul II states: “Today in an ever-increasingly acute way, the so-called ‘ecological’ question poses itself in relation to socio-economic life and work. Certainly humanity has received from God himself the task of ‘dominating’ the created world and ‘cultivating the garden’ of the world. But this is a task that humanity must carry out in respect for the divine image received, and, therefore, with intelligence and with love, assuming responsibility for the gifts that God has bestowed and continues to bestow. Humanity has in its possession a gift
that must be passed on to future generations; if possible, passed on in better condition, [for] these future generations are [also] the recipients of the Lord's gifts” (CFL 43).

Although other documents of the recent Magisterium could be cited, the above two are the ones that add the greatest depth to the Council’s teachings in this area.

6. Final considerations

If the Church’s mission in regard to temporal realities was not very developed in terms of doctrine before the Council, the present situation is quite different. Indeed, the Council’s teachings and those of recent Popes offer us a rich organic treatment that can be directly translated into life.

These teachings presume a perspective in which the Church does not look at the world from without but is immersed in it—although it also transcends the world. The Church “goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does” (GS 40), and therefore it views the world with eyes of full solidarity.

To carry out the Church’s mission in the face of earthly realities, the Magisterium repeatedly calls the laity to an all-out effort exercised with personal freedom and responsibility. This does not mean that the role of pastors is marginal. Their task of clarifying the Church’s teaching in this field is indispensable for the laity to receive the light of the Gospel that illumines their own activity in the temporal order. Even more essential is the spiritual strength the laity receive from the communication of divine life through the sacraments. Without an authentic following of Christ and, through him, union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the laity, instead of imbuing and perfecting the world of temporal realities with a Christian spirit, would become worldly, permeated with the worldly spirit St. John warns us against: “the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16). Hence the special need here for unity of life.

The Church’s mission in the face of earthly realities, grounded on each one’s personal actions, touches on three main areas: the personal dignity of all men and women, their daily activities, and the social repercussions of their actions. It also touches on the material world, and specifically on the
ecological question. The development of each of these aspects offers abundant possibilities for specific programs carried out by the laity, both individually and in association with others, Christians and non-Christians.


[7] “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolators, since then you would need to go out of the world” (*1 Cor* 5:9-10).

[8] “...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world” (*Phil* 2:15). It is the echo of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. *Mt* 5:16).


Cf. Rom 8:16-18, 23.

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; for the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:19-23. There has been much discussion, from Patristic times to the present, about how “creation” in this paragraph should be understood. The fact of having been “subjected to futility, not of its own will,” which distinguishes it from the non-believers (cf. Rom 1:21), suggests it should be understood as the non-human world (cf. Brendan Byrne, Romans, [“Sacra Pagina Series,” 6], The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 1996, pp. 254-262; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Lettera al Romani. Commentario critico-teologico, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1999, pp. 601-608; James D. G. Dunn, Romans 1-8, [“Word Biblical Commentary,” 38A], Word Books, Dallas, Texas 1988, pp. 465-475).


[23] “[God the Father] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (*Eph* 1:9-10).


[26] We don’t see any need to give precise statistical data in this article, that is the task of those who write about the history of Opus Dei. Nevertheless, to get an idea of the number of its members in the years when Vatican II was taking place (around 30,000) and the extension of its apostolic work, see Amadeo de Fuenmayor - Valentin Gómez Iglesias - José Luis Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, Princeton: Scepter, 1994, p. 285.

[27] These three aspects also correspond to the topics of the first three chapters of the pastoral constitution. The titles of the chapters are: 1. The dignity of the human person; 2. The human community; 3. Human activity in the world.


[30] “She is already present in this world, and is composed of men, that is, of members of the earthly city who have a call to form the family of God’s children during the present history of the human race, and to keep increasing it until the Lord returns....She serves as a leaven and as a kind of
soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family” (GS 40).


[32] This is how he expressed it in an interview published in *L’Osservatore della Dominica* in June of 1968: “Indeed, one of my greatest joys was to see the Second Vatican Council so clearly proclaim the divine vocation of the laity. Without any boasting, I would say that, as far as our spirit is concerned, the Council has not meant an invitation to change but, on the contrary, has confirmed what, with the grace of God, we have been living and teaching for so many years. The principal characteristic of Opus Dei is not a set of techniques or methods of apostolate, not any specific structures, but a spirit which moves one to sanctify one’s ordinary work.” (The interview is found in *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá*, no. 72).


[34] The biographies of St. Josemaría are a good source for seeing his efforts to foster the expansion of the apostolate of Opus Dei, so that it would reach thousands of people of all walks of life. Cf., for example, the previously cited work by Andres Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. III: The Divine Ways on Earth*, New York: Scepter Publishers 2005, pp. 313-359, 646-660, 694-731, 747-753. In the years right after the Second Vatican Council, the number of members of Opus Dei continued to grow and its apostolic work expanded. One need only consider the number of people who took part in the work connected with the Special General Congress during the years 1969-1970: 50,710 (26,974 men and 23,736 women) from 77 countries (cf. Fuenmayor—Gomez-Iglesias—Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, p. 381).


[36] “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church....Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity” (Paul VI, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* [hereafter cited as EN], December 8, 1975, no. 14).
“Salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy. And not an immanent salvation, meeting material or even spiritual needs, restricted to the framework of temporal existence and completely identified with temporal desires, hopes, affairs and struggles, but a salvation which exceeds all these limits in order to reach fulfillment in a communion with the one and only divine Absolute: a transcendent and eschatological salvation, which indeed has its beginning in this life but which is fulfilled in eternity” (EN 27).

“There is no reason to hide the fact that many Christians who are generous and sensitive to the dramatic questions which the problem of liberation brings with it, on wanting to commit the Church to the effort of liberation, have frequently felt the temptation to reduce its mission to the dimensions of a purely temporal project, to reduce its objectives to an anthropocentric perspective, the salvation of which it is a messenger and sacrament, to a material welfare; its activity—forgetting all spiritual and religious concern—to initiatives of the political or social order” (EN 32).

Cf. EN 34.


John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici (hereafter cited as CFL), December 30, 1988, no. 15; the italics are in the original.

Propositio 5.

Back to Contents