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

• Africa: Land of Hope

HOLY SEE

**The Roman Pontiff**

• Homily on the publication of the Instrumentum Laboris of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, Amadou Ahidjo Stadium, Yaoundé, Cameroon (March 19, 2009)

• Message to those taking part in the Rosary at the Sixth World Family Conference in Mexico City (January 17, 2009)

• Address at the gathering with young people, Dos Coqueiros Stadium, Luanda, Angola (March 21, 2009)

• General Audience, Rome (April 8, 2009)

• Homily inaugurating the Year for Priests, Vatican Basilica, Rome, Italy (June 19, 2009)

• Homily closing the Pauline Year, Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome (June 28, 2009)

• Farewell Address at the close of the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, at Ben Gurion International Airport, Tel Aviv, Israel (May 15, 2009)

• Letter convoking a Year for Priests commemorating the 150th anniversary of St. John Marie Vianney’s death, Rome (June 19, 2009)

• Celebration of Vespers in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth (May 14, 2009)

• Words on his visit to the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem (May 15, 2009)

**The Roman Curia**

• Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments granting the celebration of the optional memorial of St. Josemaría Escrivá on June 26 in the dioceses of Austria (January 9, 2009)

• Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary granting special indulgences on the occasion of the Year of the Priesthood (April 25, 2009)

PRELATE

**New Circumscriptions**
• New circumscriptions

Activities of the Prelate

• Pastoral trips
• Diaconal and Priestly ordinations

Pastoral Letters

• May 2009
• June 2009
• January 2009

Homilies

• At the Mass in suffrage for Bishop del Portillo, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (March 30, 2009)
• At the Missa in Coena Domini of Holy Thursday, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 9, 2009)
• At the Easter vigil, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 11, 2009)
• At the diaconal ordination of two faithful of the Prelature, Church of St. Josemaría, Rome (February 21, 2009)
• At the ordination of 30 deacons of the Prelature, St. Eugene’s Basilica (May 23, 2009)
• At the Mass in suffrage for Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, Gymnasium of the University of Navarra, Spain (March 23, 2009)
• At the Feast of St. Josemaría, St. Eugene’s Basilica, (June 26, 2009)

Addresses

• Presentation at the Fourth Conference on “Catholics and Public Life,” Bilbao, Spain (March 21, 2009)
• Message on the Abruzzo earthquake, Italy (April 6, 2009)

Articles and Interviews

• Interview granted to Quotidiano di Sicilia, Italy (June 27, 2009)
• Interview granted to Przewodnik Katolicki, Poznan, Poland (June 7, 2009)
• Interview granted to BBC World, London (June 18, 2009)
• Message regarding the Year of the Priesthood (June 19, 2009)

ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA

• Publishing news
• Commemorative ceremonies in honor of St. Josemaría
• Historical Institute of St. Josemaría Escrivá: third volume of Studia et Documenta
• Eucharistic celebrations on the feast of St. Josemaría

NEWS

• Other news
• First session of the processes on the life, virtues, and reputation for holiness of the married couple Tomás Alvira and Paquita Domínguez (February 19, 2009)
• Conclusion of the investigative phase of the canonization process of the Servant of God José María Hernández Garnica (March 17, 2009)
• Pontifical appointments
• Masses in suffrage for the soul of Don Álvaro
• New Centers of the Prelature
• First session of the process on the life, virtues, and reputation for sanctity of the Servant of God Encarnita Ortega Pardo (March 26, 2009)

INITIATIVES

• Laguna center for palliative care

In Brief

• La Réunion, France -- First retreat on the island
• Larache, Morocco -- Expedition Xauish
• Toledo, Spain -- Presentation of the Review Studia et Documenta
• Paris, France -- Spiritual guidance
• Ljubljana, Slovenia -- First Course on Family Development
• London, England -- Science and Faith at the Thomas More Institute
• Montevideo, Uruguay -- At the University of Montevideo
• Arcozelo, Portugal -- Conference for priests in Enxomil
• San José, Costa Rica -- Theological and Pedagogical Culture of the Faith
• Valencia, Spain -- Cultures of solidarity
• Bao Loc, Vietnam -- Rehabilitation of a home for orphans
• Pratânia, Brazil -- A social project with the municipality
• Taboão, Brazil -- Caring for the environment
• Valencia, Spain -- Communications media and Christian values
• San José, Costa Rica -- A workshop on fashions and personality
• San Martinho do Porto, Portugal -- Taking advantage of Mardi Gras vacations
• New Zealand -- Educating by Example
• Madrid, Spain -- Lecture on John Paul II’s Letter to Artists
• Londrina, Brazil -- The Family in Public Opinion
• Betulia, Mexico -- ‘El Salto’ begins activities
• Couvrelles, France -- Family Day in Couvrelles
• Syndey, Australia -- Dialogues on Temperance
• São Paulo, Brazil -- Horizons Program

IN PACE
• Suffrages for the Deceased

A STUDY
• Apostolicity of the Church and Apostolate of the Lay Faithful
EDITORIAL
Africa: Land of Hope

The Catholics of Africa, among them the faithful of Opus Dei on that continent—priests and laity, women and men of all walks of life—have experienced during these months the physical nearness of the Holy Father and have felt in a special way the unity of the universal Church. Benedict XVI’s apostolic trip to Cameroon and Angola from March 17 to 23, left a deep mark on the African nations. The trip also helped Catholics from other countries to see the religious soul of Africa and its Christian roots.

During his return flight on March 23, Benedict XVI confided to journalists the emotions he felt as he was returning to Rome. The Holy Father emphasized first the exuberant cordiality and joy he had seen in the African people: “It seems to me that in the Pope they somehow saw the personification of the fact that we are all God’s children and part of his family; this family exists, and we, with all our limitations, form part of it and God is with us. So we could say that the Pope’s presence has helped people to realize this and to be filled with joy.” And he added, “I was deeply impressed by the spirit of recollection in the liturgical celebrations, the intense sense of the sacred.”

In the various events that took place during those days, Benedict XVI reminded African Catholics of the urgent need for evangelization, the need for personal holiness, the need to foster an intense apostolate of marriage and the family, and the exercise of charity towards the poorest.

The interreligious dimension of this apostolic trip—the eleventh outside of Italy during his pontificate—was made visible in his meeting with representatives of the Muslim community in the Apostolic Nunciature of Yaoundé, on March 19. On that same day, the Holy Father met with the sick and suffering in the Cardinal Léger Center of the capital of Cameroon: “My heart was moved,” he said later, “to see there so much suffering—all the pain, the sorrow, the poverty of human life—but also to see how the State and the Church are working together to help those who suffer. The State administers this great Center in an exemplary way, while ecclesial movements and entities in the Church collaborate to truly assist these persons. And one sees, it seems to me, how human beings, in helping
those who suffer, become themselves more human, how the world becomes more human. That is what is engraved on my memory.”

In Angola the Roman Pontiff encouraged the process of peace and national reconstruction, “in which the Church is called to play an important role.” And he appealed for everyone’s prayer so that the continent may face with courage the great challenges it now confronts. “I would like to ask that the just realization of the fundamental aspirations of those most in need be the principal concern of those who exercise public responsibilities, because their intention, I am sure, is to carry out the mission entrusted to them, not for their own gain, but for the common good.” Our heart, Pope Benedict added, “cannot rest tranquil as long as there are brothers and sisters of ours who lack food, work, a home, or other basic needs. To truly help these brothers and sisters of ours, the first challenge to confront is that of solidarity: solidarity between generations, solidarity between nations and between continents, which leads to an ever more equitable sharing of the world’s resources among all mankind.”

Addressing the young people gathered in Luanda’s Dos Coqueiros Stadium on March 21, the Holy Father advised them “to read history attentively: you will see that the Church does not grow old with the passing of the years; rather she becomes ever younger, because she goes out to meet the Lord, drawing each day closer to the only true source of youth and renewed life.” And he ended with a personal appeal: “Take heart!” he told them. “Have the courage to make definitive decisions because these are the only ones that do not destroy freedom, but that orient it correctly, allowing a person to advance and attain what is great in life. Truly life has value only if you have the daring to undertake adventures, trusting that our Lord will never leave you alone.”

On March 22 he met especially with African women in the parish of St. Anthony in Luanda. The Pope recalled Teresa Gomes, an Angolese who died in the city of Sumbe in 2004 after a happy married life blessed with seven children. “Her Christian faith was indomitable and her apostolic zeal was admirable, especially during the years 1975 and 1976 when a ferocious ideological and political propaganda swept over the parish of Our Lady of Grace in Porto Amboim, almost resulting in the closing down of the parish. Teresa,” explained Pope Benedict, “became the leader of the
faithful who refused to give up in the face of that situation; she encouraged them, bravely protecting the parish structures and seeking in every possible way to have Holy Mass said again. Her love for the Church made her untiring in the work of evangelization.”

A culminating moment in the apostolic trip to Africa was the presentation of the *Instrumentum laboris*, the working document for the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, which will be held in Rome next October. Benedict XVI recalled the importance of the Synod not only for the continent, but also “for the life of the universal Church,” and prayed that it would help to “infuse in each of your particular Churches a new evangelical and missionary impulse in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace, in accord with our Lord’s own words: ‘You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world’ (*Mt* 5:13-14).”

The unity of the universal Church with our brothers and sisters in Africa will therefore continue throughout the year 2009 when, in October, many bishops and representatives from the dioceses in Africa meet in Rome with the Pope and those who assist him.

“To have a Catholic spirit,” wrote the founder of Opus Dei, “means that we should feel on our shoulders the weight of our concern for the entire Church—not just of this or that particular part of it. It means that our prayer should spread out north and south, east and west, in a generous act of petition” (*The Forge*, no. 583). The unity of Christians requires that we all pray for one another. During this year, the universal Church is praying for and feels particularly close to the Church in Africa, which is doing so much to help dioceses around the world in need of priests.

With this universal spirit, it is easy to join the Holy Father in praying the prayer that concludes the working document for the upcoming Assembly of Bishops, as he himself did in Africa: “Mother of Perpetual Help, we entrust to your maternal intercession the preparation and fruits of the Second Synod for Africa. Queen of Peace, pray for us. Our Lady of Africa, pray for us.”

Torna ai contenuti
HOLY SEE

• The Roman Pontiff
• The Roman Curia
Dear Brother Bishops,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Praised be Jesus Christ who has gathered us in this stadium today that we may enter more deeply into his life!

Jesus Christ brings us together on this day when the Church, here in Cameroon and throughout the world, celebrates the Feast of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Virgin Mary. I begin by wishing a very happy feast day to all those who, like myself, have received the grace of bearing this beautiful name, and I ask Saint Joseph to grant them his special protection in guiding them towards the Lord Jesus Christ all the days of their life. I also extend cordial best wishes to all the parishes, schools, colleges, and institutions named after Saint Joseph. I thank Archbishop Tonyé-Bakot of Yaoundé for his kind words, and I warmly greet the representatives of the African Episcopal Conferences who have come to Yaoundé for the promulgation of the Instrumentum Laboris of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

How can we enter into the specific grace of this day? In a little while, at the end of Mass, the liturgy will remind us of the focal point of our meditation when it has us pray: “Lord, today you nourish us at this altar as we celebrate the feast of Saint Joseph. Protect your Church always, and in your love watch over the gifts you have given us.” We are asking the Lord to protect the Church always — and he does! — just as Joseph protected his family and kept watch over the child Jesus during his early years.
Our Gospel reading recalls this for us. The angel said to Joseph: “Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home,” (Mt 1:20) and that is precisely what he did: “he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him” (Mt 1:24). Why was Saint Matthew so keen to note Joseph’s trust in the words received from the messenger of God, if not to invite us to imitate this same loving trust?

Although the first reading which we have just heard does not speak explicitly of Saint Joseph, it does teach us a good deal about him. The prophet Nathan, in obedience to God’s command, tells David: “I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins” (2 Sam 7:12). David must accept that he will die before seeing the fulfillment of this promise, which will come to pass “when (his) time comes” and he will rest “with (his) ancestors”. We thus come to realize that one of mankind’s most cherished desires — seeing the fruits of one’s labors — is not always granted by God. I think of those among you who are mothers and fathers of families. Parents quite rightly desire to give the best of themselves to their children, and they want to see them achieve success. Yet make no mistake about what this “success” entails: what God asks David to do is to place his trust in him. David himself will not see his heir who will have a throne “firm for ever” (2 Sam 7:16), for this heir, announced under the veil of prophecy, is Jesus. David puts his trust in God. In the same way, Joseph trusts God when he hears his messenger, the Angel, say to him: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her” (Mt 1:20). Throughout all of history, Joseph is the man who gives God the greatest display of trust, even in the face of such astonishing news.

Dear fathers and mothers here today, do you have trust in God who has called you to be the fathers and mothers of his adopted children? Do you accept that he is counting on you to pass on to your children the human and spiritual values that you yourselves have received and which will prepare them to live with love and respect for his holy name? At a time when so many people have no qualms about trying to impose the tyranny of materialism, with scant concern for the most deprived, you must be very careful. Africa in general, and Cameroon in particular, place themselves at risk if they do not recognize the True Author of Life! Brothers and sisters
in Cameroon and throughout Africa, you who have received from God so many human virtues, take care of your souls! Do not let yourselves be captivated by selfish illusions and false ideals! Believe — yes! — continue to believe in God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — he alone truly loves you in the way you yearn to be loved, he alone can satisfy you, can bring stability to your lives. Only Christ is the way of Life.

God alone could grant Joseph the strength to trust the Angel. God alone will give you, dear married couples, the strength to raise your family as he wants. Ask it of him! God loves to be asked for what he wishes to give. Ask him for the grace of a true and ever more faithful love patterned after his own. As the Psalm magnificently puts it: his “love is established for ever, his loyalty will stand as long as the heavens” (Ps 88:3).

Just as on other continents, the family today — in your country and across Africa — is experiencing a difficult time; but fidelity to God will help see it through. Certain values of the traditional life have been overturned. Relationships between different generations have evolved in a way that no longer favors the transmission of accumulated knowledge and inherited wisdom. Too often we witness a rural exodus not unlike that known in many other periods of human history. The quality of family ties is deeply affected by this. Uprooted and fragile members of the younger generation who often — sadly — are without gainful employment, seek to cure their pain by living in ephemeral and man-made paradises which we know will never guarantee the human being a deep, abiding happiness. Sometimes the African people too are constrained to flee from themselves and abandon everything that once made up their interior richness. Confronted with the phenomenon of rapid urbanization, they leave the land, physically and morally: not as Abraham had done in response to the Lord’s call, but as a kind of interior exile which alienates them from their very being, from their brothers and sisters, and from God himself.

Is this an irreversible, inevitable development? By no means! More than ever, we must “hope against all hope” (Rom 4:18). Here I wish to acknowledge with appreciation and gratitude the remarkable work done by countless associations that promote the life of faith and the practice of charity. May they be warmly thanked! May they find in the word of God
renewed strength to carry out their projects for the integral development of the human person in Africa, especially in Cameroon!

The first priority will consist in restoring a sense of the acceptance of life as a gift from God. According to both Sacred Scripture and the wisest traditions of your continent, the arrival of a child is always a gift, a blessing from God. Today it is high time to place greater emphasis on this: every human being, every tiny human person, however weak, is created “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:27). Every person must live! Death must not prevail over life! Death will never have the last word!

Sons and daughters of Africa, do not be afraid to believe, to hope, and to love; do not be afraid to say that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that we can be saved by him alone. Saint Paul is indeed an inspired author given to the Church by the Holy Spirit as a “teacher of nations” (1 Tim 2:7) when he tells us that Abraham, “hoping against hope, believed that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, ‘So shall your descendants be’” (Rom 4:18).

“Hoping against hope”: is this not a magnificent description of a Christian? Africa is called to hope through you and in you! With Jesus Christ, who trod the African soil, Africa can become the continent of hope! We are all members of the peoples that God gave to Abraham as his descendants. Each and every one of us was thought, willed and loved by God. Each and every one of us has a role to play in the plan of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If discouragement overwhelms you, think of the faith of Joseph; if anxiety has its grip on you, think of the hope of Joseph, that descendant of Abraham who hoped against hope; if exasperation or hatred seizes you, think of the love of Joseph, who was the first man to set eyes on the human face of God in the person of the Infant conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Let us praise and thank Christ for having drawn so close to us, and for giving us Joseph as an example and model of love for him.

Dear brothers and sisters, I want to say to you once more from the bottom of my heart: like Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary into your home, that is to say do not be afraid to love the Church. Mary, Mother of the Church, will teach you to follow your pastors, to love your bishops,
your priests, your deacons and your catechists; to heed what they teach you and to pray for their intentions. Husbands, look upon the love of Joseph for Mary and Jesus; those preparing for marriage, treat your future spouse as Joseph did; those of you who have given yourselves to God in celibacy, reflect upon the teaching of the Church, our Mother: “Virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but presupposes and confirms it. Marriage and virginity are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the Covenant of God with his people” (*Redemptoris Custos*, 20).

Once more, I wish to extend a particular word of encouragement to fathers so that they may take Saint Joseph as their model. He who kept watch over the Son of Man is able to teach them the deepest meaning of their own fatherhood. In the same way, each father receives his children from God, and they are created in God’s own image and likeness. Saint Joseph was the spouse of Mary. In the same way, each father sees himself entrusted with the mystery of womanhood through his own wife. Dear fathers, like Saint Joseph, respect and love your spouse; and by your love and your wise presence, lead your children to God where they must be (cf. *Lk* 2:49).

Finally, to all the young people present, I offer words of friendship and encouragement: as you face the challenges of life, take courage! Your life is priceless in the eyes of God! Let Christ take hold of you, agree to pledge your love to him, and — why not? — maybe even do so in the priesthood or in the consecrated life! This is the supreme service. To the children who no longer have a father, or who live abandoned in the poverty of the streets, to those forcibly separated from their parents, to the maltreated and abused, to those constrained to join paramilitary forces that are terrorizing some countries, I would like to say: God loves you, he has not forgotten you, and Saint Joseph protects you! Invoke him with confidence.

May God bless you and watch over you! May he give you the grace to keep advancing towards him with fidelity! May he give stability to your lives so that you may reap the fruits he awaits from you! May he make you witnesses of his love here in Cameroon and to the ends of the earth! I fervently beg him to give you a taste of the joy of belonging to him, now and for ever. Amen.
Message to those taking part in the Rosary at the Sixth World Family Conference in Mexico City (January 17, 2009)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Dear Families,

I wish all of you who have gathered to celebrate the Sixth World Meeting of Families under the motherly gaze of Our Lady of Guadalupe “Grace... and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1: 2).

You have just finished praying the Holy Rosary, contemplating the Joyful Mysteries of the Son of God made man who was born into the family of Mary and Joseph and grew up in Nazareth in the intimacy of the home, amid his daily occupations, prayer and relations with neighbors. His family welcomed him and protected him lovingly, initiated him into the observance of the religious traditions and laws of his people and accompanied him to human maturity and the mission for which he had been destined. “And Jesus,” says the Gospel according to St Luke, “increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52).

The Joyful Mysteries have alternated with the accounts of several Christian families from the five continents that are, as it were, an echo and a reflection in our time of the history of Jesus and his family. These accounts have shown us how the seed of the Gospel continues to germinate and bear fruit in various situations in today’s world.

The theme of this Sixth World Meeting of Families The family, teacher of human and Christian values reminds us that the home environment is a school of humanity and Christian life for all its members, with beneficial consequences for people, the Church and society. In fact, the home is called to live and to foster reciprocal love and truth, respect and justice, loyalty and collaboration, service and availability to others,
especially the weakest. The Christian home, which must “show forth to all men Christ’s living presence in the world and the authentic nature of the Church” (Gaudium et Spes, n. 48), must be imbued with God’s presence, placing in his hands everyday events and asking his help in carrying out its indispensable mission.

For this reason prayer in the family at the most suitable and significant moments is of supreme importance since, as the Lord himself assured us: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). And the Teacher is certainly with the family that listens and meditates on the Word of God, that learns from him what is most important in life (cf. Lk 10:41-42) and puts his teachings into practice (cf. Lk 11:28). In this way, personal and family life is transformed, gradually improved and enriched with dialogue, faith is transmitted to the children, the pleasure of being together grows and the home is further united and consolidated, like the house built upon rock (cf. Mt 7:24-25). May Pastors not cease to help families to benefit fully from the Word of God in Sacred Scripture.

With the strength that stems from prayer the family is transformed into a community of disciples and missionaries of Christ. In the family the Gospel is welcomed, passed on and it radiates. As my venerable Predecessor Pope Paul VI said: “The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, n. 71).

By living filial trust and obedience to God, fidelity and the generous acceptance of children, care for the weakest and promptness in forgiving, the Christian family becomes a living Gospel legible to all (cf. 2 Cor 3:2), as a sign of credibility that is perhaps more persuasive and better able to challenge the world today. The family should also bring its witness of life and explicit profession of faith to the various contexts of its surroundings, such as the school and various other associations. It should also be committed to the catechetical formation of the children and the pastoral activities of its parish community, especially those related to preparation for marriage or specifically addressed to family life.
Coexistence in the home is a gift for people and a source of inspiration for social coexistence, showing that freedom and solidarity are complementary, that the good of each one must take into account the good of the others and that strict justice demands openness to understanding and forgiveness for the sake of the common good. Indeed, social relations can take as a reference point the values that constitute authentic family life in order to become increasingly humanized every day and directed towards building “the civilization of love.”

Furthermore, the family is also a vital cell of society, the first and decisive resource for its development. It is also, frequently, the last resort for people whose needs the established structures cannot meet satisfactorily.

Because of its essential role in society, the family has a right to have its proper identity recognized that is not to be confused with other forms of coexistence. It is likewise entitled to expect proper cultural, legal, financial, social, and health-care protection and, most particularly, to receive support that, taking into account the number of children, provides sufficient financial resources to allow it to choose the type of education and school freely.

It is therefore necessary to promote a family culture and policy that the families themselves can develop in an organized manner. For this reason I encourage them to join associations that promote the identity and rights of the family, in accordance with an anthropological vision consistent with the Gospel, while I invite the said organizations to cooperate with one another to ensure that their coordinated activity may be more effective.

To conclude, I urge all of you to have great trust, for the family is in the Heart of God, Creator and Saviour. Working for families is working for the worthy and luminous future of humanity and for the construction of the Kingdom of God. Let us humbly invoke divine grace so that it may help us to collaborate with enthusiasm and joy in the noble cause of the family, called to be evangelized and evangelizing, human and humanizing. this beautiful task, may we be accompanied by the maternal intercession and heavenly protection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, whom I invoke
today with the glorious title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and to whom, as Mother, I entrust the families of the whole world.

Many thanks.

Address at the gathering with young people, Dos Coqueiros Stadium, Luanda, Angola (March 21, 2009)

Dear Friends,

You have come here in great numbers to be with the Successor of Peter, and you represent so many other young people who are one with us in spirit. You have come to join me in proclaiming openly the joy of our faith in Jesus Christ, and in renewing your commitment to be his faithful disciples in our time. A meeting much like this took place here in Luanda on June 7, 1992 with our beloved Pope John Paul II. Today another Pope stands before you: with a different appearance, but with the same love in his heart, and he embraces all of you in Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday, today and for ever” (Heb 13:8).

First of all I want to thank you for this celebration which you have planned for me, for the festive atmosphere which you yourselves generate, for your presence and for your joy. I cordially greet my brother Bishops and priests and all those who are engaged in youth ministry. I likewise greet with gratitude all who have prepared this event, especially the Bishops’ Commission for Young People and Vocations, and its President, Bishop Kanda Almeida, whom I thank for his warm words of welcome. I greet all the young people present, Catholics and others, who are looking for an answer to their questions and difficulties. Some of these have been expressed by your representatives, and I have listened to them with gratitude and appreciation. The embrace I exchanged with them is, naturally, an embrace which I offer to all of you.
Meeting young people is good for everyone! You may have your share of difficulties, but you are filled with great hope, great enthusiasm and a great desire to make a new beginning. My young friends, you hold within yourselves the power to shape the future. I encourage you to look to that future through the eyes of the Apostle John. Saint John tells us: “I saw a new Heaven and a new earth… and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven, from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold the dwelling of God is with men’” (Rev 21:1-3). Dear young people, God makes all the difference. His special presence among us begins with his easy intimacy with the first couple in the garden of Eden; it continues with the divine glory which shone forth from the Tent of Meeting in the midst of the People of Israel during their journey through the desert, and it culminates in the incarnation of the Son of God who became inseparably one with humanity in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself traversed the desert of our humanity and, passing beyond death, he rose from the dead and now draws all humanity with himself towards God. Jesus is no longer confined to a particular place and time. His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, flows forth from him, enters our hearts and thus joins us to him, and with him to the Father — to the God who is one and three.

Yes, my friends! God makes all the difference… and more! God changes us; he makes us new! This is what he has promised: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). It is true! The Apostle Paul tells us: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled himself to us” (2 Cor 5:17-18). In ascending to Heaven and entering eternity, Jesus Christ has become the Lord of all ages. So he can walk with us as a friend in the present, carrying in his hand the book of our days. In his hand he also holds the past, the foundation and source of our life. He also carefully holds the future, allowing us to catch a glimpse of the most beautiful dawn we will ever see: the dawn that radiates from him, the dawn of the Resurrection. God is the future of a new humanity, which is anticipated in his Church. When you have a chance, take time to read the Church’s history. You will find that the Church does not grow old with the passing of the years. Rather, she grows younger, for she is journeying
towards her Lord, day by day drawing nearer to the one true fountain overflowing with youthfulness, rebirth, the power of life.

Dear young people, the future is God. As we have just heard, “he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). At present though, and even in our midst, I see some of the many thousands of young Angolans who have been maimed or disabled as a result of the war and the landmines. I think of the countless tears that have been shed for the loss of your relatives and friends. It is not hard to imagine the dark clouds that still veil the horizon of your fondest hopes and dreams. In your hearts I see doubt, a doubt which you have expressed to me today. You are saying: “Here is what we have. There is no visible sign of the things you are talking about! The promise is backed by God’s word — and we believe it — but when will God arise and renew all things?” Jesus’ answer is the one he gave to his disciples: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (Jn 14:1-2). But you persist, dear young people: “Yes! But when will this happen?” The Apostles asked Jesus a similar question, and his answer was: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses… to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8). See how Jesus does not leave us without an answer; he tells us one thing very clearly: renewal starts from within; you will receive a power from on high. The power to shape the future is within you.

It is within you, but how? Just as life exists within a seed. That is how Jesus explained it at a critical juncture in his ministry. The beginning of his ministry was accompanied by great enthusiasm. People saw the sick healed, demons cast out, the Gospel proclaimed, but otherwise the world had not changed: the Romans remained in power and everyday life continued to be hard, despite those miracles and those beautiful words. People’s enthusiasm was waning so much that even some of his disciples had left the Master (cf. Jn 6:66) who preached but did not change the world. Everyone was asking: deep down, what value does this message have? What has this prophet of
God brought us? It was then that Jesus spoke about the sower who sows in the field of the world, and he explained that the seed is his word (Mk 4:3-20) and his miracles of healing. These are so few in comparison to the immense needs and demands of everyday life. And yet, deep within the seed, the future is already present, since the seed contains tomorrow’s bread, tomorrow’s life. The seed seems almost nothing. But it is the presence of the future, the promise already present. When it falls on good soil, it produces fruit, thirty, sixty and even a hundredfold.

My dear friends, you are a seed which God has sown in the world, a seed that contains power from on high, the power of the Holy Spirit. And yet, the only way to pass from the promise of life to actually bearing fruit is to give your lives in love, to die for love. Jesus himself said: “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (Jn 12:24-25). This is what Jesus said, and this is how he acted. His crucifixion seems like complete failure, but it is not! Jesus, in the power of “the eternal Spirit, offered himself without blemish to God” (Heb 9:14). Thus, once he fell to the earth, he could bear fruit in every time and place. In your midst you have the new Bread, the Bread of future life, the Most Holy Eucharist, which nourishes us and pours out the life of the Trinity into the hearts of all people.

Dear young people, as seeds filled with the power of the same eternal Spirit, sprout up before the warmth of the Eucharist, in which the Lord’s testament is fulfilled: he gives himself to us and we respond by giving ourselves to others, for love of him. This is the way that leads to life; it can be followed only by maintaining a constant dialogue with the Lord and among yourselves. The dominant societal culture is not helping you to live by Jesus’ word or to practice the self-giving to which he calls you in accordance with the Father’s plan. Yet, dear friends, you have the power within you, just as it was in Jesus when he said: “the Father who dwells in me does his works… he who believes in me, will also do the works that I do; and he will do greater works than these, because I go to the Father” (Jn 14:10,12). So do not be afraid to make definitive decisions. You do not lack generosity — that I know! But the idea of risking a lifelong commitment, whether in marriage or in a life of special consecration, can be daunting.
You might think: “The world is in constant flux and life is full of possibilities. Can I make a life-long commitment now, without knowing what unforeseen events lie in store for me? By making a definitive decision, would I not be risking my freedom and tying my own hands?” These are the doubts you feel, and today’s individualistic and hedonist culture aggravates them. Yet when young people avoid decisions, there is a risk of never attaining to full maturity!

I say to you: Take courage! Dare to make definitive decisions, because in reality these are the only decisions which do not destroy your freedom, but guide it in the right direction, enabling you to move forward and attain something worthwhile in life. There is no doubt about it: life is worthwhile only if you take courage and are ready for adventure, if you trust in the Lord who will never abandon you. Young people of Angola, unleash the power of the Holy Spirit within you, the power from on high! Trusting in this power, like Jesus, risk taking a leap and making a definitive decision. Give life a chance! In this way islands, oases and great stretches of Christian culture will spring up in your midst, and bring to light that “holy city coming down out of Heaven, from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”. This is the life worthy of being lived, and I commend it to you from my heart. May God bless the young people of Angola!

General Audience, Rome (April 8, 2009)

The Easter Triduum

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Holy Week, which for Christians is the most important week of the year, gives us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the central events of the Redemption, to relive the Paschal Mystery, the great Mystery of faith. As of tomorrow afternoon, with the Mass in Coena Domini, the solemn liturgical rites will help us to meditate more vividly on the Passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord in the days of the Holy Triduum of Easter, the cornerstone of the entire liturgical year. May divine grace open our
hearts to an understanding of the invaluable gift of salvation, obtained for us by Christ's sacrifice. We find this immense gift wonderfully described in a famous hymn contained in the Letter to the Philippians (cf. 2: 6-11), upon which we have meditated several times during Lent. The Apostle concisely and effectively retraces the mystery of the history of salvation, mentioning the arrogance of Adam who, although he was not God, wanted to be like God. And he compares the arrogance of the first man, which we all tend to feel in our being, with the humility of the true Son of God who, in becoming man does not hesitate to take upon himself all human weaknesses, save sin, and going even as far as the depths of death. This descent to the ultimate depths of the Passion and death is followed by his exaltation, the true glory, the glory of love which went to the very end.

And it is therefore right as St Paul says that "at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue profess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (ibid., 2:10-11). With these words, St Paul refers to a prophecy of Isaiah in which God says: I am God... to me every knee shall bend in Heaven and on earth (cf. Is 45:23). This, Paul says, applies to Jesus Christ. He truly is, in his humility, in the true greatness of his love, the Lord of the world and before him every knee bends.

How marvelous and at the same time surprising this mystery is! We can never sufficiently meditate on this reality. In spite of being God, Jesus does not want to make his divine prerogative an exclusive possession; he does not want to use his being as God, his glorious dignity and his power, as an instrument of triumph and a sign of remoteness from us. On the contrary, "he empties himself", taking on the wretched and weak human condition. In this regard Paul uses a rather evocative Greek verb to indicate the *kénosis*, this humbling of Jesus'. In Christ the divine form (*morphē*) was hidden beneath the human form, that is, beneath our reality marked by suffering, by poverty, by our human limitations and by death. His radical, true sharing in our nature, a sharing in all things save sin, led him to that boundary which is the sign of our finiteness, death. However, all this was not the fruit of an obscure mechanism or blind fatality: rather, it was his own free choice, through generous adherence to the Father's saving plan. And the death he went to meet, Paul adds, was that of crucifixion, the
most humiliating and degrading death imaginable. The Lord of the universe did all this out of love for us: out of love he chose "to empty himself" and make himself our brother; out of love he shared our condition, that of every man and every woman. Theodoret of Cyrus, a great witness of the Oriental tradition, wrote on this subject: "being God and God by nature and having equality with God he did not consider this something great, as do those who have received some honor greater than that which they deserve but, concealing his merits, he chose the most profound humility and took the form of a human being" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians, 2: 6-7).

The prelude to the Easter Triduum which will begin tomorrow as I said with the evocative afternoon rites of Holy Thursday, is the solemn Chrism Mass, which the Bishop celebrates with his priests in the morning, and during which the priestly promises pronounced on the day of Ordination are renewed. This is a gesture of great value, an especially favorable opportunity in which priests reaffirm their personal fidelity to Christ who has chosen them as his ministers. This priestly encounter acquires, in addition, a special importance because it is, as it were, a preparation for the Year for Priests, which I established on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé d'Ars and which will begin next 19 June. Again, during the Chrism Mass the oil of the sick and that of the catechumens will be blessed and the Chrism consecrated. These are rites that symbolically signify the fullness of Christ's Priesthood and the ecclesial communion that must inspire the Christian people gathered for the Eucharistic sacrifice and enlivened in unity by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the afternoon Mass, called in Coena Domini, the Church commemorates the institution of the Eucharist, the ministerial priesthood and the new Commandment of love that Jesus entrusted to his disciples. St Paul offers one of the oldest accounts of what happened in the Upper Room, on the vigil of the Lord's Passion. "The Lord Jesus", he writes at the beginning of the 50s, on the basis of a text he received from the Lord's own environment, "on the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me'. In the same way, after the supper, he
took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:23-25). These words, laden with mystery, clearly show Christ's will: under the species of the Bread and the Wine, he makes himself present with his body given and his Blood poured out. This is the sacrifice of the new and everlasting covenant offered to all, without distinction of race or culture. It is from this sacramental rite, which he presents to the Church as the supreme evidence of his love, that Jesus makes ministers of his disciples and all those who will continue the ministry through the centuries. Thus, Holy Thursday constitutes a renewed invitation to give thanks to God for the supreme gift of the Eucharist, to receive with devotion and to adore with living faith. For this reason the Church encourages the faithful to keep vigil in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament after the celebration of Holy Mass, recalling the sorrowful hour that Jesus spent in solitude and prayer at Gethsemane, before being arrested and then sentenced to death.

And so we come to Good Friday, the day of the Passion and the Crucifixion of the Lord. Every year, standing in silence before Jesus hanging on the wood of the Cross, we feel how full of love the words were that he spoke on the previous evening during the Last Supper. "This is my blood, of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mk 14: 24). Jesus wanted to offer his life in sacrifice for the remission of humanity's sins. As it does before the Eucharist, as well as before the Passion and death of Jesus on the Cross, the mystery eludes reason. We are placed before something which, humanly, may appear senseless: a God who is not only made Man, with all the needs of man, who not only suffers to save man, taking upon himself the whole tragedy of humanity, but also dies for man.

Christ's death recalls the accumulated sorrow and evils that weigh upon humanity of every age: the crushing weight of our death, the hatred and violence that still today stain the earth with blood. The Passion of the Lord continues in the suffering of human beings. As Blaise Pascal has rightly written: "Jesus will be in agony even to the end of the world. We must not sleep during that time" (Pensées, 553). If Good Friday is a day full of sorrow, it is therefore at the same time a particularly propitious day to reawaken our faith, to consolidate our hope and courage so that each one of us may carry our cross with humility, trust and abandonment in God,
certain of his support and his victory. The liturgy of this day sings: *O Crux, ave, spes unica*—Hail, O Cross, our only hope!

This hope is nourished in the great silence of Holy Saturday, in expectation of the Resurrection of Jesus. On this day the Churches are unadorned and no particular liturgical rites are scheduled. The Church keeps vigil in prayer like Mary and with Mary, sharing her same sentiments of sorrow and of trust in God. It is rightly recommended that a prayerful atmosphere be preserved throughout the day, favorable for meditation and reconciliation; the faithful are encouraged to receive the sacrament of Penance, to be able to take part in the Easter festivities truly renewed.

The recollection and silence of Holy Saturday will usher us into the night of the solemn Easter Vigil, "mother of all vigils", when the hymn of joy in Christ's Resurrection will burst forth in all the churches and communities. Once again the victory of light over darkness, of life over death will be proclaimed and the Church will rejoice in the encounter with her Lord. Thus we shall enter into the atmosphere of Easter.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us prepare to live the Holy Triduum intensely, in order to share ever more deeply in the Mystery of Christ. We are accompanied in this itinerary by the Blessed Virgin who silently followed her Son Jesus to Calvary, taking part with deep sorrow in his sacrifice and thus cooperating in the mystery of the Redemption and becoming Mother of all believers (cf. *Jn* 19:25-27). Together with her we shall enter the Upper Room, we shall remain at the foot of the Cross, we shall watch in spirit beside the dead Christ, waiting with hope for the dawn of the radiant day of the Resurrection. In view of this, I express to you all from this moment my most cordial good wishes for a happy and holy Easter, together with your families, parishes and communities.

*To English-speaking pilgrims:*

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience. May your visit to Rome during this Holy Week fill you with the peace, hope and joy of Christ Jesus!

*(In Polish)*
On the threshold of the Easter Triduum, I wish for you that living in faith the mysteries of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ will permit all of you to experience the love of God and awaken the hope of participating in his glory.

(*To the groups of Hungarian pilgrims*)

In these holy days may you feel the greatness of the love which the Son of God manifested with his sorrowful passion, with his death on the cross, and with his glorious resurrection. Give him thanks with sure faith and with faithful love.

(*To the Croatian pilgrims*)

Jesus loved us to the end. During these days there is renewed before our eyes the mystery of crucified love. Follow our Lord with a confident heart and give him thanks with a sure faith and a faithful love, so that there be manifested in you the powerful strength of the Risen One.

(*Greeting to those affected by the earthquake in the Italian region of L’Aquila*)

I wish to renew my spiritual closeness to the beloved community of L’Aquila and the other towns harshly struck by the violent seismic phenomenon in the past days which has taken such a heavy toll of victims and so many injured, as well as causing immense material damage. The concern with which the authorities, the police force, volunteers and other workers are rescuing these brothers and sisters of ours shows how important solidarity is in overcoming such painful trials together. Once again I wish to say to those beloved peoples that the Pope shares their suffering and their worries. Dear friends, I hope to come and visit you as soon as possible. Know that the Pope is praying for you all, imploring the Lord’s mercy for the deceased, and for their relatives and the survivors, the maternal comfort of Mary and the support of Christian hope.

(*To the participants in the UNIV International Congress*)

My dear friends, I urge you to respond with joy to the call of our Lord to give full meaning to your lives: in your studies, in your relations with your companions, in your family, and in society. “Many great things” said
St. Josemaría Escrivá, “depend—don’t forget it—on whether you and I live our lives as God wants.

Greetings to the young people, to the sick, and to those recently married. Tomorrow we will begin the Holy Triduum, which will make us relive the central mysteries of our salvation. I invite you, my dear young people, to find in the Cross the light necessary to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer. And for you, my dear sick people, may the passion of our Lord which culminates in the triumph of Easter, always provide a source of hope. And to you, my dear newly weds, may living the Paschal mystery transform your lives into a reciprocal gift.

Homily inaugurating the Year for Priests, Vatican Basilica, Rome, Italy (June 19, 2009)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In a little while we shall sing in the antiphon to the Magnificat: “The Lord has drawn us to his heart—Suscepit nos Dominus in sinum et cor suum.”

God’s heart, as the expression of his will, is spoken of twenty-six times in the Old Testament. Before God’s heart men and women stand judged. His heartfelt pain at sins of mankind makes God decide on the flood, but then he is touched by the sight of human weakness and offers his forgiveness. Yet another passage of the Old Testament speaks of God’s heart with absolute clarity: it is in the eleventh chapter of the book of the Prophet Hosea, whose opening lines portray the Lord’s love for Israel at the dawn of its history: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11:1). Israel, however, responds to God’s constant offer of love with indifference and even outright ingratitude. “The more I called them,” the Lord is forced to admit, “the more they went from me” (v. 2). Even so, he never abandons Israel to the power of its enemies, because “my heart”—the Creator of the universe observes—”recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender” (v. 8).
The heart of God burns with compassion! On today’s solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus the Church presents us this mystery for our contemplation: the mystery of the heart of a God who feels compassion and who bestows all his love upon humanity. A mysterious love, which in the texts of the New Testament is revealed to us as God’s boundless and passionate love for mankind. God does not lose heart in the face of ingratitude or rejection by the people he has chosen; rather, with infinite mercy he sends his only-begotten Son into the world to take upon himself the fate of a shattered love, so that by defeating the power of evil and death he could restore to human beings enslaved by sin their dignity as sons and daughters. But this took place at great cost—the only-begotten Son of the Father was sacrificed on the Cross: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (cf. Jn 13:1). The symbol of this love which transcends death is his side, pierced by a spear. The Apostle John, an eyewitness, tells us: “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (cf. Jn 19:34).

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for responding to my invitation and coming in great numbers to this celebration with which we inaugurate the Year for Priests. I greet the Cardinals and Bishops, in particular the Cardinal Prefect and the Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy, together with the officials of that Congregation and the Bishop of Ars. I greet the priests and seminarians from the various seminaries and colleges in Rome; the men and women religious and all the lay faithful present. In a special way I greet His Beatitude Ignace Youssef Younan, the Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrians, who has come to Rome to meet me and to recognize publicly the “ecclesiastica communio” which I have granted him.

Together let us pause to contemplate the pierced heart of the Crucified One. Just now we heard once again, in the brief reading from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, that “God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4-6). To be “in” Jesus Christ is already to be seated in heaven. The very core of Christianity is expressed in the heart of Jesus; in Christ the revolutionary “newness” of the Gospel is completely revealed and given to us: the Love
that saves us and even now makes us live in the eternity of God. As the Evangelist John writes: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (3:16). God’s heart calls to our hearts, inviting us to come out of ourselves, to forsake our human certainties, to trust in him and, by following his example, to make ourselves a gift of unbounded love.

While it is true that Jesus’ invitation to “abide in my love” (cf. Jn 15:9) is addressed to all the baptized, on this feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the day of prayer for the sanctification of priests, this invitation resounds all the more powerfully for us priests. It does so in a special way this evening, at the solemn inauguration of the Year for Priests which I have proclaimed to mark the 150th anniversary of the death of the saintly Curé of Ars. A lovely and touching saying of his, quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, comes immediately to mind: “the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus” (n. 1589). How can we fail to be moved when we recall that the gift of our priestly ministry flows directly from this heart? How can we forget that we priests were consecrated to serve, humbly yet authoritatively, the common priesthood of the faithful? Ours is an mission which is indispensable for the Church and for the world, a mission which calls for complete fidelity to Christ and constant union with him. To abide in his love entails constantly striving for holiness, as did Saint John Mary Vianney.

In the Letter which I wrote to you for this special Jubilee Year, dear brother priests, I wished to highlight some essential aspects of our ministry by making reference to the example and teaching of the Curé of Ars, the model and protector of all priests, especially parish priests. I hope that my Letter will prove a help and encouragement to you in making this Year a graced opportunity to grow ever closer to Jesus, who counts on us, his ministers, to spread and build up his Kingdom, and to radiate his love and his truth. As I invited you at the conclusion of my Letter: “in the footsteps of the Curé of Ars, let yourselves be enthralled by Christ. In this way you too will be, for the world in our time, heralds of hope, reconciliation and peace!”

To be completely enthralled by Christ! This was the goal of the entire life of Saint Paul, to whom we looked throughout the Pauline Year now
ending; this was the goal of the entire ministry of the Curé of Ars, whom we shall invoke in particular during this Year for Priests; may it also be the primary goal for each and every one of us. Certainly, to be ministers at the service of the Gospel, study and careful, ongoing pastoral and theological formation are useful and necessary, but even more necessary is that “knowledge of love” which can only be learned in a “heart to heart” encounter with Christ. For it is he who calls us to break the bread of his love, to forgive sins and to guide the flock in his name. And for that reason we must never step back from the source of love which is his heart, pierced on the Cross.

Only in this way can we cooperate effectively in the mysterious “plan of the Father” which consists in “making Christ the heart of the world”! This plan is accomplished in history as Jesus gradually becomes the Heart of human hearts, beginning with those called to be closest to him: namely his priests. We are reminded of this constant commitment by the “priestly promises” that we made on the day of our ordination and which we renew yearly on Holy Thursday during the Chrism Mass. Even our shortcomings, our limitations and our weaknesses ought to bring us back to the heart of Jesus. If it is true that by contemplating Christ sinners learn from him the “sorrow for sins” needed to bring them back to the Father, this is even more the case for sacred ministers. How can we forget, in this regard, that nothing causes more suffering for the Church, the Body of Christ, than the sins of her pastors, especially the sins of those who become “thieves and robbers” of the sheep (cf. Jn 10:1 ff.), lead them astray by their own private teachings, or ensnare them in the toils of sin and death? Dear priests, the summons to conversion and to trust in God’s mercy also applies to us; we too must humbly, sincerely and unceasingly implore the heart of Jesus to preserve us from the terrifying risk of endangering the very people we are obliged to save.

A few moments ago, in the Choir Chapel, I was able to venerate the relic of the saintly Curé of Ars: his heart. A heart that blazed with divine love, experienced amazement at the thought of the dignity of the priest, and spoke to the faithful in touching and sublime tones, telling them that “after God, the priest is everything!... Only in heaven will he fully realize what he is” (cf. Letter for the Year for Priests, p. 3). Dear brothers, let us
cultivate this same amazement, in order to carry out our ministry with generosity and dedication, and to maintain the true “fear of God” in our hearts: the fear, that is, that we can deprive of so much good, by our negligence or fault, the souls entrusted to our care, or that—God forbid—we can do them harm. The Church needs holy priests; ministers capable of helping the faithful to experience the Lord’s merciful love, and convinced witnesses of that love. In the Eucharistic Adoration which is to follow our celebration of Vespers, let us ask the Lord to set the heart of every priest afire with that “pastoral charity” which can make him one in heart and mind with Jesus the High Priest, and thus to imitate Jesus in complete self-giving. May the Virgin Mary, whose Immaculate Heart we shall contemplate with lively faith tomorrow, obtain this grace for us. The Curé of Ars had a filial devotion to Mary, a devotion so profound that in 1836, in anticipation of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, he dedicated his parish to Mary “conceived without sin.” He frequently renewed this offering of the parish to the Blessed Virgin, teaching his parishioners that “to be heard it is enough to speak to her,” for the simple reason that she “desires above all else to see us happy.” May the Blessed Virgin, our Mother, accompany us during the Year for Priests which we begin today, so that we can be wise and steady guides of the flock which the Lord has entrusted to our pastoral care. Amen!

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Homily closing the Pauline Year, Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome (June 28, 2009)

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate
and in the Priesthood,

Distinguished Members of the
Delegation of the Ecumenical
Patriarchate,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I address my cordial greeting to each one of you. In particular, I greet the Cardinal Archpriest of this Basilica and his collaborators, I greet the Abbot and the Benedictine monastic community; I also greet the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The commemorative year for the birth of St. Paul ends this evening. We have gathered at the tomb of the Apostle whose sarcophagus, preserved beneath the papal altar, was recently the object of a careful scientific analysis. A tiny hole was drilled in the sarcophagus, which in so many centuries had never been opened, in order to insert a special probe which revealed traces of a precious purple-colored linen fabric, with a design in gold leaf, and a blue fabric with linen threads. Grains of red incense and protein and chalk substances were also found. In addition, minute fragments of bone were sent for carbon-14 testing by experts unaware of their provenance. The fragments proved to belong to someone who had lived between the first and second centuries. This would seem to confirm the unanimous and undisputed tradition which claims that these are the mortal remains of the apostle Paul. All this fills our hearts with profound emotion. In recent months, many people have followed the paths of the Apostle the exterior and especially the interior paths on which he traveled in his lifetime: the road to Damascus towards his encounter with the Risen One; the routes of the Mediterranean world which he crossed with the torch of the Gospel, encountering contradiction and adherence until his martyrdom, through which he belongs for ever to the Church of Rome. It was to her that he also addressed his most important Letter. The Pauline Year is drawing to a close but what will remain a part of Christian existence is the journey with Paul with him and thanks to him getting to know Jesus, and, like the Apostle, being enlightened and transformed by the Gospel. And always, going beyond the circle of believers, he remains the “teacher of the Gentiles,” who seeks to bring the message of the Risen One to them all, because Christ has known and loved each one; he has died and risen for them all. Therefore let us too listen to him at this time when we are solemnly beginning the Feast of the two Apostles who were bound to one another by a close bond.
It is part of the structure of Paul’s Letters always in reference to the particular place and situation that they first of all explain the mystery of Christ, they teach faith. The second part treats their application to our lives: what ensues from this faith? How does it shape our existence, day by day? In the Letter to the Romans, this second part begins in chapter 12, in which the Apostle briefly sums up the essential nucleus of Christian existence in the first two verses. What does St. Paul say to us in that passage? First of all he affirms, as a fundamental thing, that a new way of venerating God began with Christ a new form of worship. It consists in the fact that the living person himself becomes adoration, “sacrifice,” even in his own body. It is no longer things that are offered to God. It is our very existence that must become praise of God. But how does this happen? In the second verse we are given the answer: “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...” (12:2). The two decisive words of this verse are “transformed” and “renewal.” We must become new people, transformed into a new mode of existence. The world is always in search of novelty because, rightly, it is always dissatisfied with concrete reality. Paul tells us: the world cannot be renewed without new people. Only if there are new people will there also be a new world, a renewed and better world. In the beginning is the renewal of the human being. This subsequently applies to every individual. Only if we ourselves become new does the world become new. This also means that it is not enough to adapt to the current situation. The Apostle exhorts us to non-conformism. In our Letter he says: we should not submit to the logic of our time. We shall return to this point, reflecting on the second text on which I wish to meditate with you this evening. The Apostle’s “no” is clear and also convincing for anyone who observes the “logic” of our world. But to become new how can this be done? Are we really capable of it? With his words on becoming new, Paul alludes to his own conversion: to his encounter with the Risen Christ, an encounter of which, in the Second Letter to the Corinthians he says: “if anyone is in Christ, he is in a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (5:17). This encounter with Christ was so overwhelming for him that he said of it: “I... died...” (Gal 2: 19; cf. Rom 6). He became new, another, because he no longer lived for himself and by virtue of himself, but for Christ and in him. In the course of the years,
however, he also saw that this process of renewal and transformation continues throughout life. We become new if we let ourselves be grasped and shaped by the new Man, Jesus Christ. He is the new Man par excellence. In him the new human existence became reality and we can truly become new if we deliver ourselves into his hands and let ourselves be molded by him.

Paul makes this process of “recasting” even clearer by saying that we become new if we transform our way of thinking. What has been introduced here with “way of thinking” is the Greek term “nous.” It is a complex word. It may be translated as “spirit,” “sentiments,” “reason,” and precisely, also by “way of thinking.” Thus our reason must become new. This surprises us. We might have expected instead that this would have concerned some attitude: what we should change in our behavior. But no: renewal must go to the very core. Our way of looking at the world, of understanding reality all our thought must change from its foundations. The reasoning of the former person, the common way of thinking is usually directed to possession, well-being, influence, success, fame and so forth. Yet in this way its scope is too limited. Thus, in the final analysis, one’s “self” remains the centre of the world. We must learn to think more profoundly. St. Paul tells us what this means in the second part of the sentence: it is necessary to learn to understand God’s will, so that it may shape our own will. This is in order that we ourselves may desire what God desires, because we recognize that what God wants is the beautiful and the good. It is therefore a question of a turning point in our fundamental spiritual orientation. God must enter into the horizon of our thought: what he wants and the way in which he conceived of the world and of me. We must learn to share in the thinking and the will of Jesus Christ. It is then that we will be new people in whom a new world emerges.

Paul illustrates the same idea of a necessary renewal of our way of being human in two passages of his Letter to the Ephesians; let us therefore reflect on them briefly. In the Letter’s fourth chapter, the Apostle tells us that with Christ we must attain adulthood, a mature faith. We can no longer be “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...” (4: 14). Paul wants Christians to have a “responsible” and “adult faith.” The words “adult faith” in recent decades have formed a
widespread slogan. It is often meant in the sense of the attitude of those who no longer listen to the Church and her Pastors but autonomously choose what they want to believe and not to believe hence a do-it-yourself faith. And it is presented as a “courageous” form of self-expression against the Magisterium of the Church. In fact, however, no courage is needed for this because one may always be certain of public applause. Rather, courage is needed to adhere to the Church’s faith, even if this contradicts the “logic” of the contemporary world. This is the non-conformism of faith which Paul calls an “adult faith.” It is the faith that he desires. On the other hand, he describes chasing the winds and trends of the time as infantile. Thus, being committed to the inviolability of human life from its first instant, thereby radically opposing the principle of violence also precisely in the defense of the most defenseless human creatures is part of an adult faith. It is part of an adult faith to recognize marriage between a man and a woman for the whole of life as the Creator’s ordering, newly re-established by Christ. Adult faith does not let itself be carried about here and there by any trend. It opposes the winds of fashion. It knows that these winds are not the breath of the Holy Spirit; it knows that the Spirit of God is expressed and manifested in communion with Jesus Christ. However, here too Paul does not stop at saying “no,” but rather leads us to the great “yes.” He describes the mature, truly adult faith positively with the words: “speaking the truth in love” (cf. Eph 4: 15). The new way of thinking, given to us by faith, is first and foremost a turning towards the truth. The power of evil is falsehood. The power of faith, the power of God, is the truth. The truth about the world and about ourselves becomes visible when we look to God. And God makes himself visible to us in the Face of Jesus Christ. In looking at Christ, we recognize something else: truth and love are inseparable. In God both are inseparably one; it is precisely this that is the essence of God. For Christians, therefore, truth and love go together. Love is the test of truth. We should always measure ourselves anew against this criterion, so that truth may become love and love may make us truthful.

Another important thought appears in this verse of St. Paul. The Apostle tells us that by acting in accordance with truth in love, we help to ensure that all things (ta panta) the universe may grow, striving for Christ. On the basis of his faith, Paul is not only concerned in our personal rectitude nor with the growth of the Church alone. He is interested in the
universe: *ta pànta*. The ultimate purpose of Christ’s work is the universe the transformation of the universe, of the whole human world, of all creation. Those who serve the truth in love together with Christ contribute to the true progress of the world. Yes, here it is quite clear that Paul is acquainted with the idea of progress. Christ his life, his suffering and his rising was the great leap ahead in the progress of humanity, of the world. Now, however, the universe must grow in accordance with him. Where the presence of Christ increases, therein lies the true progress of the world. There, mankind becomes new and thus the world is made new.

Paul makes the same thing clear from yet another different perspective. In chapter three of the Letter to the Ephesians he speaks to us of the need to be “strengthened... in the inner man” (3:16). With this he takes up a subject that earlier, in a troubled situation, he had addressed in the Second Letter to the Corinthians. “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day” (4:16). The inner person must be strengthened this is a very appropriate imperative for our time, in which people all too often remain inwardly empty and must therefore cling to promises and drugs, which then result in a further growth of the sense of emptiness in their hearts. This interior void the weakness of the inner person is one of the great problems of our time. Interiority must be reinforced the perceptiveness of the heart; the capacity to see and to understand the world and the person from within, with one’s heart. We are in need of reason illuminated by the heart in order to learn to act in accordance with truth in love. However, this is not realized without an intimate relationship with God, without the life of prayer. We need the encounter with God that is given to us in the sacraments. And we cannot speak to God in prayer unless we let him speak first, unless we listen to him in the words that he has given us. In this regard Paul says to us: “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (*Eph* 3:17ff.). With these words Paul tells us that love sees beyond simple reason. And he also tells us that only in communion with all the saints, that is, in the great community of all believers and not against or without it can we know the immensity of
Christ’s mystery. He circumscribes this immensity with words meant to express the dimensions of the cosmos: breadth, length and height and depth. The mystery of Christ has a cosmic vastness; he did not belong only to a specific group. The Crucified Christ embraces the entire universe in all its dimensions. He takes the world in his hands and lifts it up towards God. Starting with St. Irenaeus of Lyons thus from the second century the Fathers have seen in these words on the breadth, length and height and depth of Christ’s love an allusion to the Cross. In the Cross, Christ’s love embraced the lowest depths the night of death as well as the supreme heights, the loftiness of God himself. And he took into his arms the breadth and the vastness of humanity and of the world in all their distances. He always embraces the universe, he embraces all of us.

Let us pray the Lord to help us to recognize something of the immensity of his love. Let us pray to him asking that his love and his truth may touch our hearts. Let us ask that Christ dwell in our hearts and make us new men and women who act according to truth in love. Amen!

Farewell Address at the close of the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, at Ben Gurion International Airport, Tel Aviv, Israel (May 15, 2009)

Mr. President,

Mr. Prime Minister,

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I prepare to return to Rome, may I share with you some of the powerful impressions that my pilgrimage to the Holy Land has left with me. I had fruitful discussions with the civil authorities both in Israel and in the Palestinian Territories, and I witnessed the great efforts that both governments are making to secure people’s well-being. I have met the leaders of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, and I rejoice to see the
way that they work together in caring for the Lord’s flock. I have also had the opportunity to meet the leaders of the various Christian Churches and ecclesial communities as well as the leaders of other religions in the Holy Land. This land is indeed a fertile ground for ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, and I pray that the rich variety of religious witness in the region will bear fruit in a growing mutual understanding and respect.

Mr. President, you and I planted an olive tree at your residence on the day that I arrived in Israel. The olive tree, as you know, is an image used by Saint Paul to describe the very close relations between Christians and Jews. Paul describes in his Letter to the Romans how the Church of the Gentiles is like a wild olive shoot, grafted onto the cultivated olive tree which is the People of the Covenant (cf. 11:17-24). We are nourished from the same spiritual roots. We meet as brothers, brothers who at times in our history have had a tense relationship, but now are firmly committed to building bridges of lasting friendship.

The ceremony at the Presidential Palace was followed by one of the most solemn moments of my stay in Israel- my visit to the Holocaust Memorial at Yad Vashem, where I paid my respects to the victims of the Shoah. There also I met some of the survivors. Those deeply moving encounters brought back memories of my visit three years ago to the death camp at Auschwitz, where so many Jews—mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends—were brutally exterminated under a godless regime that propagated an ideology of anti-Semitism and hatred. That appalling chapter of history must never be forgotten or denied. On the contrary, those dark memories should strengthen our determination to draw closer to one another as branches of the same olive tree, nourished from the same roots and united in brotherly love.

Mr. President, I thank you for the warmth of your hospitality, which is greatly appreciated, and I wish to put on record that I came to visit this country as a friend of the Israelis, just as I am a friend of the Palestinian people. Friends enjoy spending time in one another’s company, and they find it deeply distressing to see one another suffer. No friend of the Israelis and the Palestinians can fail to be saddened by the continuing tension between your two peoples. No friend can fail to weep at the suffering and
loss of life that both peoples have endured over the last six decades. Allow me to make this appeal to all the people of these lands: No more bloodshed! No more fighting! No more terrorism! No more war! Instead let us break the vicious circle of violence. Let there be lasting peace based on justice, let there be genuine reconciliation and healing. Let it be universally recognized that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and to enjoy peace and security within internationally agreed borders. Let it be likewise acknowledged that the Palestinian people have a right to a sovereign independent homeland, to live with dignity and to travel freely. Let the two-state solution become a reality, not remain a dream. And let peace spread outwards from these lands, let them serve as a “light to the nations” (Is 42:6), bringing hope to the many other regions that are affected by conflict.

One of the saddest sights for me during my visit to these lands was the wall. As I passed alongside it, I prayed for a future in which the peoples of the Holy Land can live together in peace and harmony without the need for such instruments of security and separation, but rather respecting and trusting one another, and renouncing all forms of violence and aggression. Mr President, I know how hard it will be to achieve that goal. I know how difficult is your task, and that of the Palestinian Authority. But I assure you that my prayers and the prayers of Catholics across the world are with you as you continue your efforts to build a just and lasting peace in this region.

It remains only for me to express my heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed in so many ways to my visit. To the Government, the organizers, the volunteers, the media, to all who have provided hospitality to me and those accompanying me, I am deeply grateful. Please be assured that you are remembered with affection in my prayers. To all of you, I say: thank you, and may God be with you. Shalom!

Torna ai contenuti
Letter convoking a Year for Priests commemorating the 150th anniversary of St. John Marie Vianney’s death, Rome (June 19, 2009)

Dear Brother Priests,

On the forthcoming Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Friday 19 June 2009 — a day traditionally devoted to prayer for the sanctification of the clergy —, I have decided to inaugurate a “Year for Priests” in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the “dies natalis” of John Mary Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests worldwide.[1] This Year, meant to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world, will conclude on the same Solemnity in 2010. “The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus,” the saintly Curé of Ars would often say. [2] This touching expression makes us reflect, first of all, with heartfelt gratitude on the immense gift which priests represent, not only for the Church, but also for humanity itself. I think of all those priests who quietly present Christ’s words and actions each day to the faithful and to the whole world, striving to be one with the Lord in their thoughts and their will, their sentiments and their style of life. How can I not pay tribute to their apostolic labors, their tireless and hidden service, their universal charity? And how can I not praise the courageous fidelity of so many priests who, even amid difficulties and incomprehension, remain faithful to their vocation as “friends of Christ,” whom he has called by name, chosen and sent?

I still treasure the memory of the first parish priest at whose side I exercised my ministry as a young priest: he left me an example of unreserved devotion to his pastoral duties, even to meeting his own death in the act of bringing viaticum to a gravely ill person. I also recall the countless confreres whom I have met and continue to meet, not least in my pastoral visits to different countries: men generously dedicated to the daily exercise of their priestly ministry. Yet the expression of Saint John Mary also makes us think of Christ’s pierced Heart and the crown of thorns which surrounds it. I also think, therefore, of the countless situations of suffering endured by
many priests, either because they themselves share in the manifold human experience of pain or because they encounter misunderstanding from the very persons to whom they minister. How can we not also think of all those priests who are offended in their dignity, obstructed in their mission and persecuted, even at times to offering the supreme testimony of their own blood?

There are also, sad to say, situations which can never be sufficiently deplored where the Church herself suffers as a consequence of infidelity on the part of some of her ministers. Then it is the world which finds grounds for scandal and rejection. What is most helpful to the Church in such cases is not only a frank and complete acknowledgment of the weaknesses of her ministers, but also a joyful and renewed realization of the greatness of God’s gift, embodied in the splendid example of generous pastors, religious afire with love for God and for souls, and insightful, patient spiritual guides. Here the teaching and example of Saint John Mary Vianney can serve as a significant point of reference for us all. The Curé of Ars was very humble, yet as a priest he was conscious of being an immense gift to his people: “A good shepherd, a pastor after God’s heart, is the greatest treasure which the good Lord can grant to a parish, and one of the most precious gifts of divine mercy.”[3] He spoke of the priesthood as if incapable of fathoming the grandeur of the gift and task entrusted to a human creature: “O, how great is the priest! … If he realized what he is, he would die… God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host….”[4] Explaining to his parishioners the importance of the sacraments, he would say: “Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest. And if this soul should happen to die [as a result of sin], who will raise it up, who will restore its calm and peace? Again, the priest… After God, the priest is everything! … Only in heaven will he fully realize what he is.”[5] These words, welling up from the priestly heart of the holy pastor, might sound excessive. Yet they reveal the high esteem in which he held the sacrament of the priesthood. He seemed overwhelmed
by a boundless sense of responsibility: “Were we to fully realize what a priest is on earth, we would die: not of fright, but of love… Without the priest, the passion and death of our Lord would be of no avail. It is the priest who continues the work of redemption on earth… What use would be a house filled with gold, were there no one to open its door? The priest holds the key to the treasures of heaven: it is he who opens the door: he is the steward of the good Lord; the administrator of his goods … Leave a parish for twenty years without a priest, and they will end by worshiping the beasts there … The priest is not a priest for himself, he is a priest for you.”[6]

He arrived in Ars, a village of 230 souls, warned by his Bishop beforehand that there he would find religious practice in a sorry state: “There is little love of God in that parish; you will be the one to put it there.” As a result, he was deeply aware that he needed to go there to embody Christ’s presence and to bear witness to his saving mercy: “[Lord,] grant me the conversion of my parish; I am willing to suffer whatever you wish, for my entire life!”: with this prayer he entered upon his mission.[7] The Curé devoted himself completely to his parish’s conversion, setting before all else the Christian education of the people in his care. Dear brother priests, let us ask the Lord Jesus for the grace to learn for ourselves something of the pastoral plan of Saint John Mary Vianney! The first thing we need to learn is the complete identification of the man with his ministry. In Jesus, person and mission tend to coincide: all Christ’s saving activity was, and is, an expression of his “filial consciousness” which from all eternity stands before the Father in an attitude of loving submission to his will. In a humble yet genuine way, every priest must aim for a similar identification. Certainly this is not to forget that the efficacy of the ministry is independent of the holiness of the minister; but neither can we overlook the extraordinary fruitfulness of the encounter between the ministry’s objective holiness and the subjective holiness of the minister. The Curé of Ars immediately set about this patient and humble task of harmonizing his life as a minister with the holiness of the ministry he had received, by deciding to “live,” physically, in his parish church: As his first biographer tells us: “Upon his arrival, he chose the church as his home. He
entered the church before dawn and did not leave it until after the evening Angelus. There he was to be sought whenever needed.”[8]

The pious excess of his devout biographer should not blind us to the fact that the Curé also knew how to “live” actively within the entire territory of his parish: he regularly visited the sick and families, organized popular missions and patronal feasts, collected and managed funds for charitable and missionary works, embellished and furnished his parish church, cared for the orphans and teachers of the “Providence” (an institute he founded); provided for the education of children; founded confraternities and enlisted lay persons to work at his side.

His example naturally leads me to point out that there are sectors of cooperation which need to be opened ever more fully to the lay faithful. Priests and laity together make up the one priestly people[9] and in virtue of their ministry priests live in the midst of the lay faithful, “that they may lead everyone to the unity of charity, ‘loving one another with mutual affection; and outdoing one another in sharing honor’” (Rom 12:10).[10] Here we ought to recall the Second Vatican Council’s hearty encouragement to priests “to be sincere in their appreciation and promotion of the dignity of the laity and of the special role they have to play in the Church’s mission. … They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and acknowledge their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able together with them to discern the signs of the times.”[11]

Saint John Mary Vianney taught his parishioners primarily by the witness of his life. It was from his example that they learned to pray, halting frequently before the tabernacle for a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.[12] “One need not say much to pray well” — the Curé explained to them — “We know that Jesus is there in the tabernacle: let us open our hearts to him, let us rejoice in his sacred presence. That is the best prayer.”[13] And he would urge them: “Come to communion, my brothers and sisters, come to Jesus. Come to live from him in order to live with him…[14] “Of course you are not worthy of him, but you need him!”[15] This way of educating the faithful to the Eucharistic presence and to communion proved most effective when they saw him celebrate the Holy
Sacrifice of the Mass. Those present said that “it was not possible to find a finer example of worship... He gazed upon the Host with immense love.”[16] “All good works, taken together, do not equal the sacrifice of the Mass” — he would say — “since they are human works, while the Holy Mass is the work of God.”[17] He was convinced that the fervor of a priest’s life depended entirely upon the Mass: “The reason why a priest is lax is that he does not pay attention to the Mass! My God, how we ought to pity a priest who celebrates as if he were engaged in something routine.”[18] He was accustomed, when celebrating, also to offer his own life in sacrifice: “What a good thing it is for a priest each morning to offer himself to God in sacrifice.”[19]

This deep personal identification with the Sacrifice of the Cross led him — by a sole inward movement — from the altar to the confessional. Priests ought never to be resigned to empty confessionals or the apparent indifference of the faithful to this sacrament. In France, at the time of the Curé of Ars, confession was no more easy or frequent than in our own day, since the upheaval caused by the revolution had long inhibited the practice of religion. Yet he sought in every way, by his preaching and his powers of persuasion, to help his parishioners to rediscover the meaning and beauty of the sacrament of Penance, presenting it as an inherent demand of the Eucharistic presence. He thus created a “virtuous” circle. By spending long hours in church before the tabernacle, he inspired the faithful to imitate him by coming to visit Jesus with the knowledge that their parish priest would be there, ready to listen and offer forgiveness. Later, the growing numbers of penitents from all over France would keep him in the confessional for up to sixteen hours a day. It was said that Ars had become “a great hospital of souls.”[20] His first biographer relates that “the grace he obtained [for the conversion of sinners] was so powerful that it would pursue them, not leaving them a moment of peace!”[21] The saintly Curé reflected something of the same idea when he said: “It is not the sinner who returns to God to beg his forgiveness, but God himself who runs after the sinner and makes him return to him.”[22] “This good Saviour is so filled with love that he seeks us everywhere.”[23]

We priests should feel that the following words, which he put on the lips of Christ, are meant for each of us personally: “I will charge my
ministers to proclaim to sinners that I am ever ready to welcome them, that my mercy is infinite.”[24] From Saint John Mary Vianney we can learn to put our unfailing trust in the sacrament of Penance, to set it once more at the centre of our pastoral concerns, and to take up the “dialogue of salvation” which it entails. The Curé of Ars dealt with different penitents in different ways. Those who came to his confessional drawn by a deep and humble longing for God’s forgiveness found in him the encouragement to plunge into the “flood of divine mercy” which sweeps everything away by its vehemence. If someone was troubled by the thought of his own frailty and inconstancy, and fearful of sinning again, the Curé would unveil the mystery of God’s love in these beautiful and touching words: “The good Lord knows everything. Even before you confess, he already knows that you will sin again, yet he still forgives you. How great is the love of our God: he even forces himself to forget the future, so that he can grant us his forgiveness!”[25] But to those who made a lukewarm and rather indifferent confession of sin, he clearly demonstrated by his own tears of pain how “abominable” this attitude was: “I weep because you don’t weep,”[26] he would say. “If only the Lord were not so good! But he is so good! One would have to be a brute to treat so good a Father this way!!”[27] He awakened repentance in the hearts of the lukewarm by forcing them to see God’s own pain at their sins reflected in the face of the priest who was their confessor. To those who, on the other hand, came to him already desirous of and suited to a deeper spiritual life, he flung open the abyss of God’s love, explaining the untold beauty of living in union with him and dwelling in his presence: “Everything in God’s sight, everything with God, everything to please God… How beautiful it is!”[28] And he taught them to pray: “My God, grant me the grace to love you as much as I possibly can.”[29]

In his time the Curé of Ars was able to transform the hearts and the lives of so many people because he enabled them to experience the Lord’s merciful love. Our own time urgently needs a similar proclamation and witness to the truth of Love: Deus caritas est (1 Jn: 4:8). Thanks to the word and the sacraments of Jesus, John Mary Vianney built up his flock, although he often trembled from a conviction of his personal inadequacy, and desired more than once to withdraw from the responsibilities of the parish ministry out of a sense of his unworthiness. Nonetheless, with
exemplary obedience he never abandoned his post, consumed as he was by apostolic zeal for the salvation of souls. He sought to remain completely faithful to his own vocation and mission through the practice of an austere asceticism: “The great misfortune for us parish priests — he lamented — is that our souls grow tepid”; meaning by this that a pastor can grow dangerously inured to the state of sin or of indifference in which so many of his flock are living. He himself kept a tight rein on his body, with vigils and fasts, lest it rebel against his priestly soul. Nor did he avoid self-mortification for the good of the souls in his care and as a help to expiating the many sins he heard in confession. To a priestly confrere he explained: “I will tell you my recipe: I give sinners a small penance and the rest I do in their place.” Aside from the actual penances which the Curé of Ars practiced, the core of his teaching remains valid for each of us: souls have been won at the price of Jesus’ own blood, and a priest cannot devote himself to their salvation if he refuses to share personally in the “precious cost” of redemption.

In today’s world, as in the troubled times of the Curé of Ars, the lives and activity of priests need to be distinguished by a determined witness to the Gospel. As Pope Paul VI rightly noted, “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” Lest we experience existential emptiness and the effectiveness of our ministry be compromised, we need to ask ourselves ever anew: “Are we truly pervaded by the word of God? Is that word truly the nourishment we live by, even more than bread and the things of this world? Do we really know that word? Do we love it? Are we deeply engaged with this word to the point that it really leaves a mark on our lives and shapes our thinking?” Just as Jesus called the Twelve to be with him (cf. Mk 3:14), and only later sent them forth to preach, so too in our days priests are called to assimilate that “new style of life” which was inaugurated by the Lord Jesus and taken up by the Apostles.

It was complete commitment to this “new style of life” which marked the priestly ministry of the Curé of Ars. Pope John XXIII, in his Encyclical Letter Sacerdotii nostri primordia, published in 1959 on the first centenary of the death of Saint John Mary Vianney, presented his asceticism with special reference to the “three evangelical counsels” which the Pope
considered necessary also for diocesan priests: “even though priests are not bound to embrace these evangelical counsels by virtue of the clerical state, these counsels nonetheless offer them, as they do all the faithful, the surest road to the desired goal of Christian perfection.” \[^{35}\] The Curé of Ars lived the “evangelical counsels” in a way suited to his priestly state. His poverty was not the poverty of a religious or a monk, but that proper to a priest: while managing much money (since well-to-do pilgrims naturally took an interest in his charitable works), he realized that everything had been donated to his church, his poor, his orphans, the girls of his “Providence,” \[^{36}\] his families of modest means. Consequently, he “was rich in giving to others and very poor for himself.” \[^{37}\] As he would explain: “My secret is simple: give everything away; hold nothing back.” \[^{38}\] When he lacked money, he would say amiably to the poor who knocked at his door: “Today I’m poor just like you, I’m one of you.” \[^{39}\] At the end of his life, he could say with absolute tranquility: “I no longer have anything. The good Lord can call me whenever he wants.” \[^{40}\] His chastity, too, was that demanded of a priest for his ministry. It could be said that it was a chastity suited to one who must daily touch the Eucharist, who contemplates it blissfully and with that same bliss offers it to his flock. It was said of him that “he radiated chastity”; the faithful would see this when he turned and gazed at the tabernacle with loving eyes.” \[^{41}\] Finally, Saint John Mary Vianney’s obedience found full embodiment in his conscientious fidelity to the daily demands of his ministry. We know how he was tormented by the thought of his inadequacy for parish ministry and by a desire to flee “in order to bewail his poor life, in solitude.” \[^{42}\] Only obedience and a thirst for souls convinced him to remain at his post. As he explained to himself and his flock: “There are no two good ways of serving God. There is only one: serve him as he desires to be served.” \[^{43}\] He considered this the golden rule for a life of obedience: “Do only what can be offered to the good Lord.” \[^{44}\]

In this context of a spirituality nourished by the practice of the evangelical counsels, I would like to invite all priests, during this Year dedicated to them, to welcome the new springtime which the Spirit is now bringing about in the Church, not least through the ecclesial movements and the new communities. “In his gifts the Spirit is multifaceted… He breathes where he wills. He does so unexpectedly, in unexpected places, and in ways previously unheard of… but he also shows us that he works
with a view to the one body and in the unity of the one body.”[45] In this regard, the statement of the Decree Presbyterorum Ordinis continues to be timely: “While testing the spirits to discover if they be of God, priests must discover with faith, recognize with joy and foster diligently the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, whether these be of a humble or more exalted kind.”[46] These gifts, which awaken in many people the desire for a deeper spiritual life, can benefit not only the lay faithful but the clergy as well. The communion between ordained and charismatic ministries can provide “a helpful impulse to a renewed commitment by the Church in proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel of hope and charity in every corner of the world.”[47] I would also like to add, echoing the Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis of Pope John Paul II, that the ordained ministry has a radical “communitarian form” and can be exercised only in the communion of priests with their Bishop.[48] This communion between priests and their Bishop, grounded in the sacrament of Holy Orders and made manifest in Eucharistic concelebration, needs to be translated into various concrete expressions of an effective and affective priestly fraternity.[49] Only thus will priests be able to live fully the gift of celibacy and build thriving Christian communities in which the miracles which accompanied the first preaching of the Gospel can be repeated.

The Pauline Year now coming to its close invites us also to look to the Apostle of the Gentiles, who represents a splendid example of a priest entirely devoted to his ministry. “The love of Christ urges us on” — he wrote — “because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died” (2 Cor 5:14). And he adds: “He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (2 Cor 5:15). Could a finer program be proposed to any priest resolved to advance along the path of Christian perfection?

Dear brother priests, the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Saint John Mary Vianney (1859) follows upon the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Lourdes (1858). In 1959 Blessed Pope John XXIII noted that “shortly before the Curé of Ars completed his long and admirable life, the Immaculate Virgin appeared in another part of France to an innocent and humble girl, and entrusted to her a message of prayer and penance which continues, even a century later, to
yield immense spiritual fruits. The life of this holy priest whose centenary we are commemorating in a real way anticipated the great supernatural truths taught to the seer of Massabielle. He was greatly devoted to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin; in 1836 he had dedicated his parish church to Our Lady Conceived without Sin and he greeted the dogmatic definition of this truth in 1854 with deep faith and great joy.”

The Curé would always remind his faithful that “after giving us all he could, Jesus Christ wishes in addition to bequeath us his most precious possession, his Blessed Mother.”

To the Most Holy Virgin I entrust this Year for Priests. I ask her to awaken in the heart of every priest a generous and renewed commitment to the ideal of complete self-oblation to Christ and the Church which inspired the thoughts and actions of the saintly Curé of Ars. It was his fervent prayer life and his impassioned love of Christ Crucified that enabled John Mary Vianney to grow daily in his total self-oblation to God and the Church. May his example lead all priests to offer that witness of unity with their Bishop, with one another and with the lay faithful, which today, as ever, is so necessary. Despite all the evil present in our world, the words which Christ spoke to his Apostles in the Upper Room continue to inspire us: “In the world you have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Our faith in the Divine Master gives us the strength to look to the future with confidence. Dear priests, Christ is counting on you. In the footsteps of the Curé of Ars, let yourselves be enthralled by him. In this way you too will be, for the world in our time, heralds of hope, reconciliation and peace!

[1] He was proclaimed as such by Pope Pius XI in 1929.
“Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. ‘I look at him and he looks at me’: this is what a certain peasant of Ars used to say to his holy Curé about his prayer before the tabernacle” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2715).

[12] Ibid. 
[29] Ibid., p. 77.


[31] Ibid., p. 189.


[34] Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy, 16 March 2009.

[35] P. I.

[36] The name given to the house where more than sixty abandoned girls were taken in and educated. To maintain this house he would do anything: “*J’ai fait tous les commerces imaginables,*” he would say with a smile (NODET, p. 214).

[37] NODET, p. 216.

[38] Ibid., p. 215.

[39] Ibid., p. 216.

[40] Ibid., p. 214.

[41] Cf. ibid., p. 112.

[42] Cf. ibid., pp. 82-84; 102-103.

[43] Ibid., p. 75.

[44] Ibid., p. 76.


[46] No. 9.

[47] Benedict XVI, Address to Bishop-Friends of the Focolare Movement and the Sant’Egidio Community, 8 February 2007


Celebration of Vespers in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth (May 14, 2009)

Brother Bishops,
Father Custos,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is profoundly moving for me to be present with you today in the very place where the Word of God was made flesh and came to dwell among us. How fitting that we should gather here to sing the Evening Prayer of the Church, giving praise and thanks to God for the marvels he has done for us! I thank Archbishop Sayah for his words of welcome and through him I greet all the members of the Maronite community here in the Holy Land. I greet the priests, religious, members of ecclesial movements and pastoral workers from all over Galilee. Once again I pay tribute to the care shown by the Friars of the Custody, over many centuries, in maintaining holy places such as this. I greet the Latin Patriarch Emeritus, His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, who for more than twenty years presided over his flock in these lands. I greet the faithful of the Latin Patriarchate and their current Patriarch, His Beatitude Fouad Twal, as well as the members of the Greek-Melkite community, represented here by Archbishop Elias Chacour. And in this place where Jesus himself grew to maturity and learned the Hebrew tongue, I greet the Hebrew-speaking Christians, a reminder to us of the Jewish roots of our faith.

What happened here in Nazareth, far from the gaze of the world, was a singular act of God, a powerful intervention in history, through which a child was conceived who was to bring salvation to the whole world. The wonder of the Incarnation continues to challenge us to open up our understanding to the limitless possibilities of God’s transforming power, of his love for us, his desire to be united with us. Here the eternally begotten Son of God became man, and so made it possible for us, his brothers and
sisters, to share in his divine sonship. That downward movement of self-emptying love made possible the upward movement of exaltation in which we too are raised to share in the life of God himself (cf. Phil 2:6-11).

The Spirit who “came upon Mary” (cf. Lk 1:35) is the same Spirit who hovered over the waters at the dawn of Creation (cf. Gen 1:2). We are reminded that the Incarnation was a new creative act. When our Lord Jesus Christ was conceived in Mary’s virginal womb through the power of the Holy Spirit, God united himself with our created humanity, entering into a permanent new relationship with us and ushering in a new Creation. The narrative of the Annunciation illustrates God’s extraordinary courtesy (cf. Mother Julian of Norwich, Revelations 77-79). He does not impose himself, he does not simply pre-determine the part that Mary will play in his plan for our salvation: he first seeks her consent. In the original Creation there was clearly no question of God seeking the consent of his creatures, but in this new Creation he does so. Mary stands in the place of all humanity. She speaks for us all when she responds to the angel’s invitation. Saint Bernard describes how the whole court of heaven was waiting with eager anticipation for her word of consent that consummated the nuptial union between God and humanity. The attention of all the choirs of angels was riveted on this spot, where a dialogue took place that would launch a new and definitive chapter in world history. Mary said, “Let it be done to me according to your word.” And the Word of God became flesh.

When we reflect on this joyful mystery, it gives us hope, the sure hope that God will continue to reach into our history, to act with creative power so as to achieve goals which by human reckoning seem impossible. It challenges us to open ourselves to the transforming action of the Creator Spirit who makes us new, makes us one with him, and fills us with his life. It invites us, with exquisite courtesy, to consent to his dwelling within us, to welcome the Word of God into our hearts, enabling us to respond to him in love and to reach out in love towards one another.

In the State of Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Christians form a minority of the population. Perhaps at times you feel that your voice counts for little. Many of your fellow Christians have emigrated, in the hope of finding greater security and better prospects elsewhere. Your situation calls
to mind that of the young virgin Mary, who led a hidden life in Nazareth, with little by way of worldly wealth or influence. Yet to quote Mary’s words in her great hymn of praise, the Magnificat, God has looked upon his servant in her lowliness, he has filled the hungry with good things. Draw strength from Mary’s canticle, which very soon we will be singing in union with the whole Church throughout the world! Have the confidence to be faithful to Christ and to remain here in the land that he sanctified with his own presence! Like Mary, you have a part to play in God’s plan for salvation, by bringing Christ forth into the world, by bearing witness to him and spreading his message of peace and unity. For this, it is essential that you should be united among yourselves, so that the Church in the Holy Land can be clearly recognized as “a sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (Lumen Gentium, 1). Your unity in faith, hope and love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, enabling you to be effective instruments of God’s peace, helping to build genuine reconciliation between the different peoples who recognize Abraham as their father in faith. For, as Mary joyfully proclaimed in her Magnificat, God is ever “mindful of his mercy, the mercy promised to our forefathers, to Abraham and his children for ever” (Lk 1:54-55).

Dear friends in Christ, be assured that I constantly remember you in my prayer, and I ask you to do the same for me. Let us turn now towards our heavenly Father, who in this place looked upon his servant in her lowliness, and let us sing his praises in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary, with all the choirs of angels and saints, and with the whole Church in every part of the world.

Words on his visit to the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem (May 15, 2009)

Dear Friends in Christ,
The hymn of praise which we have just sung unites us with the angelic hosts and the Church of every time and place—“the glorious company of the apostles, the noble fellowship of the prophets and the white-robed army of martyrs”—as we give glory to God for the work of our redemption, accomplished in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Before this Holy Sepulcher, where the Lord “overcame the sting of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers,” I greet all of you in the joy of the Easter season. I thank Patriarch Fouad Twal and the Custos, Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, for their kind greeting. I likewise express my appreciation for the reception accorded me by the Hierarchs of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church. I gratefully acknowledge the presence of representatives of the other Christian communities in the Holy Land. I greet Cardinal John Foley, Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre and also the Knights and Ladies of the Order here present, with gratitude for their unfailing commitment to the support of the Church’s mission in these lands made holy by the Lord’s earthly presence.

Saint John’s Gospel has left us an evocative account of the visit of Peter and the Beloved Disciple to the empty tomb on Easter morning. Today, at a distance of some twenty centuries, Peter’s Successor, the Bishop of Rome, stands before that same empty tomb and contemplates the mystery of the Resurrection. Following in the footsteps of the Apostle, I wish to proclaim anew, to the men and women of our time, the Church’s firm faith that Jesus Christ “was crucified, died and was buried,” and that “on the third day he rose from the dead.” Exalted at the right hand of the Father, he has sent us his Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. Apart from him, whom God has made Lord and Christ, “there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we are to be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Standing in this holy place, and pondering that wondrous event, how can we not be “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37), like those who first heard Peter’s preaching on the day of Pentecost? Here Christ died and rose, never to die again. Here the history of humanity was decisively changed. The long reign of sin and death was shattered by the triumph of obedience and life; the wood of the Cross lay bare the truth about good and evil; God’s judgement was passed on this world and the grace of the Holy Spirit was
poured out upon humanity. Here Christ, the new Adam, taught us that evil never has the last word, that love is stronger than death, that our future, and the future of all humanity, lies in the hands of a faithful and provident God.

The empty tomb speaks to us of hope, the hope that does not disappoint because it is the gift of the Spirit of life (cf. Rom 5:5). This is the message that I wish to leave with you today, at the conclusion of my pilgrimage to the Holy Land. May hope rise up ever anew, by God’s grace, in the hearts of all the people dwelling in these lands! May it take root in your hearts, abide in your families and communities, and inspire in each of you an ever more faithful witness to the Prince of Peace! The Church in the Holy Land, which has so often experienced the dark mystery of Golgotha, must never cease to be an intrepid herald of the luminous message of hope which this empty tomb proclaims. The Gospel reassures us that God can make all things new, that history need not be repeated, that memories can be healed, that the bitter fruits of recrimination and hostility can be overcome, and that a future of justice, peace, prosperity and cooperation can arise for every man and woman, for the whole human family, and in a special way for the people who dwell in this land so dear to the heart of the Saviour.

This ancient Memorial of the Anástasis bears mute witness both to the burden of our past, with its failings, misunderstandings and conflicts, and to the glorious promise which continues to radiate from Christ’s empty tomb. This holy place, where God’s power was revealed in weakness, and human sufferings were transfigured by divine glory, invites us to look once again with the eyes of faith upon the face of the crucified and risen Lord. Contemplating his glorified flesh, completely transfigured by the Spirit, may we come to realize more fully that even now, through Baptism, “we bear in our bodies the death of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our own mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:10-11). Even now, the grace of the resurrection is at work within us! May our contemplation of this mystery spur our efforts, both as individuals and as members of the ecclesial community, to grow in the life of the Spirit through conversion, penance and prayer. May it help us to overcome, by the power of that same Spirit, every conflict and tension born of the flesh, and to remove every obstacle,
both within and without, standing in the way of our common witness to Christ and the reconciling power of his love.

With these words of encouragement, dear friends, I conclude my pilgrimage to the holy places of our redemption and rebirth in Christ. I pray that the Church in the Holy Land will always draw new strength from its contemplation of the empty tomb of the Savior. In that tomb it is called to bury all its anxieties and fears, in order to rise again each day and continue its journey through the streets of Jerusalem, Galilee and beyond, proclaiming the triumph of Christ’s forgiveness and the promise of new life. As Christians, we know that the peace for which this strife-torn land yearns has a name: Jesus Christ. “He is our peace,” who reconciled us to God in one body through the Cross, bringing an end to hostility (cf. Eph 2:14). Into his hands, then, let us entrust all our hope for the future, just as in the hour of darkness he entrusted his spirit into the Father’s hands.

Allow me to conclude with a special word of fraternal encouragement to my brother Bishops and priests, and to the men and women religious who serve the beloved Church in the Holy Land. Here, before the empty tomb, at the very heart of the Church, I invite you to rekindle the enthusiasm of your consecration to Christ and your commitment to loving service of his mystical Body. Yours is the immense privilege of bearing witness to Christ in this, the land which he sanctified by his earthly presence and ministry. In pastoral charity enable your brothers and sisters, and all the inhabitants of this land, to feel the healing presence and the reconciling love of the Risen One. Jesus asks each of us to be a witness of unity and peace to all those who live in this City of Peace. As the new Adam, Christ is the source of the unity to which the whole human family is called, that unity of which the Church is the sign and sacrament. As the Lamb of God, he is the source of that reconciliation which is both God’s gift and a sacred task enjoined upon us. As the Prince of Peace, he is the source of that peace which transcends all understanding, the peace of the new Jerusalem. May he sustain you in your trials, comfort you in your afflictions, and confirm you in your efforts to proclaim and extend his Kingdom. To all of you, and to those whom you serve, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of Easter joy and peace.
The Roman Curia

Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments granting the celebration of the optional memorial of St. Josemaría Escrivá on June 26 in the dioceses of Austria (January 9, 2009)

Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments by which the celebration of the Mass for St. Josemaria Escriva is granted as a memoria ad libitum [optional memorial] in the dioceses of Austria (January 9, 2009).

CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM
Prot. N. 772/08/L

AUSTRIAE

Instante Eminentissimo ac Reverendissimo Domino Christophoro Card. Schönborn, Archiepiscopo et Preside Conferentiae Episcoporum Austriae, litteris die 8 mensis decembris anno 2008 datis, vigore facultatum huic Congregationi a Summo Pontifice BENEDICTO XVI tributarum, perlibenter concedimus ut

celebratio Sancti Iosephmariae Escrivá de Balaguer, presbyteri, in Calendarium proprium eiusdem nationis inseri valeat, die 26 iunii gradu memoriae ad libitum quotannis peragenda.

Contrariis quibuslibet minime obstantibus.
Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary, In which it granted special indulgences for the Year for Priests (April 25, 2009)

Special Indulgence for the Year for Priests

As has been announced, the Holy Father Benedict XVI has decided to establish a special Year for Priests on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of St John Mary Vianney, the holy Curé d’Ars, a shining model of a Pastor totally dedicated to the service of the people of God. During the Year for Priests which will begin on June 19, 2009 and will end on June 19, 2010, the gift of special Indulgences is granted as described in the following Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary, published on May 12.

DECREE

Shortly the day will come on which will be commemorated the 150th anniversary of the pious departure to Heaven of St John Mary Vianney, the Curé d’Ars. This Saint was a wonderful model here on earth of a true Pastor at the service of Christ’s flock.

Since his example is used to encourage the faithful, and especially priests, to imitate his virtues, the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI has
established that for this occasion a special Year for Priests will be celebrated, from June 19, 2009 to June 19, 2010, in which all priests may be increasingly strengthened in fidelity to Christ with devout meditation, spiritual exercises and other appropriate actions.

This holy period will begin with the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a day of priestly sanctification on which the Supreme Pontiff will celebrate Vespers in the presence of the holy relics of St John Mary Vianney, brought to Rome by the Bishop of Belley-Ars, France.

The Most Holy Father will likewise preside at the conclusion of the Year for Priests in St Peter's Square, in the presence of priests from across the world who will renew their fidelity to Christ and the bond of brotherhood.

May priests commit themselves, with prayer and good works, to obtaining from Christ the Eternal High Priest, the grace to shine with Faith, Hope, Charity and the other virtues, and show by their way of life, but also with their external conduct, that they are dedicated without reserve to the spiritual good of the people something that the Church has always had at heart.

The gift of Sacred Indulgences which the Apostolic Penitentiary, with this Decree issued in conformity with the wishes of the August Pontiff, graciously grants during the Year for Priests will be of great help in achieving the desired purpose in the best possible way.

A. Truly repentant priests who, on any day, devoutly recite at least morning Lauds or Vespers before the Blessed Sacrament, exposed for public adoration or replaced in the tabernacle, and who, after the example of St John Mary Vianney, offer themselves with a ready and generous heart for the celebration of the sacraments, especially Confession, are mercifully granted in God the Plenary Indulgence which they may also apply to their deceased brethren in suffrage, if, in conformity with the current norms, they receive sacramental confession and the Eucharistic banquet and pray for the Supreme Pontiff's intentions.

Furthermore the Partial Indulgence is granted to priests who may apply it to their deceased confreres every time that they devoutly recite the prayers duly approved to lead a holy life and to carry out in a holy manner
the offices entrusted to them.

B. The Plenary Indulgence is granted to all the faithful who are truly repentant who, in church or in chapel, devoutly attend the divine Sacrifice of Mass and offer prayers to Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest, for the priests of the Church, and any other good work which they have done on that day, so that he may sanctify them and form them in accordance with His Heart, as long as they have made expiation for their sins through sacramental confession and prayed in accordance with the Supreme Pontiff’s intentions: on the days in which the Year for Priests begins and ends, on the day of the 150th anniversary of the pious passing of St John Mary Vianney, on the first Thursday of the month or on any other day established by the local Ordinaries for the benefit of the faithful.

It will be most appropriate, in cathedral and parish churches, for the same priests who are in charge of pastoral care to publicly direct these exercises of devotion, to celebrate Holy Mass and to hear the confession of the faithful.

The Plenary Indulgence will likewise be granted to the elderly, the sick and all those who for any legitimate reason are confined to their homes who, with a mind detached from any sin and with the intention of fulfilling as soon as possible the three usual conditions, at home or wherever their impediment detains them, provided that on the above-mentioned days they recite prayers for the sanctification of priests and confidently offer the illnesses and hardships of their lives to God through Mary Queen of Apostles.

Lastly, the Partial Indulgence is granted to all the faithful every time they devoutly recite five Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glorias, or another expressly approved prayer, in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to obtain that priests be preserved in purity and holiness of life.

This Decree is valid for the entire duration of the Year for Priests. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given in Rome, at the Offices of the Apostolic Penitentiary on 25 April, the Feast of St Mark the Evangelist, in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord 2009.
+ Cardinal James Francis Stafford
Major Penitentiary
+ Gianfranco Girotti, O.F.M. Conv.
Titular Bishop of Meta, Regen
L. + S.
Prot. N. 136/09/I

Torna ai contenuti
PRELATE

- New Circumscriptions
- Activities of the Prelate
- Pastoral Letters
- Homilies
- Addresses
- Articles and Interviews
New Circumscriptions

New circumscriptions

On June 6, 2009, Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, established that

Minas Gerais will become dependent on the Delegation of Rio de Janeiro, by the following decree:

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

DECRETUM

Quo aptius provideatur curæ laboris apostolici Prælaturæ in territorio Fodinarum Generalium (Minas Gerais) in Regione Brasiliæ, perspecto n. 153 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei, auditis Consilio Generali atque Assessoratu Centrali necnon Vicario Regionali Brasiliæ et Vicario Delegationis cuius interest, hoc præsenti decreto

STATUIMUS

ut territorium Fodinarum Generalium pertineat posthac ad circumscriptionem Delegationis sedem habentis Flumine Ianuario.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 6, mensis iunii, anno 2009.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius

Reg. Gen. R. Lib. VI pag. 34

On June 27, 2009, Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, extended the territory of the Delegation of Southeast Asia, dependent on the Prelate, as a
result of the beginning of stable work in Korea, 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.

Ut provideatur curæ laboris apostolici Prælaturæ in Corea, auditis Consilio Generali et Assessoratu Centrali, decreto hoc nostro statuimus ut extendatur territorium Delegationis Asiæ Meridionalis Orientalis, a nobis dependentis, quæ posthac complectetur territoria Sciamchiameni (Hong Kong), Macai, Coamceuæ (Canton), Singaporis, Taivaniae, Malesiae et Coreæ.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 27, mense iunio, anno 2009.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Praelatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. Lib. VI pag. 35

On June 27, 2009, Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, extended the territory of the Quasi-Region of Austria, as a result of the beginning of stable work in Romania, by the following decree:

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

DECRETUM

Perspecto n. 150 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei.

Ut provideatur curæ laboris apostolici Prælaturæ in Romania, de Consilii Generalis atque Assessoratus Centralis consensu, decreto hoc
On June 27, 2009, Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, extended the territory of the Region of the Philippines, as a result of the beginning of stable work in Indonesia, by the following decree:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia

Prælatus

DECRETUM

Perspecto n. 150 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei.

Ut provideatur curæ laboris apostolici Prælaturæ in Indonesia, de Consilii Generalis atque Assessoratus Centralis consensu, decreto hoc nostro statuimus ut extendatur territorium Regionis Philippinarum, quæ posthac territoria Philippinarum et Indonesiæ complectetur.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiae Prælatitiae, die 27, mense iunio, anno 2009.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Prælatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælatitiae Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. Lib. VI pag. 35
Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral trips

Budapest, Hungary, from February 26 to 28

The apostolic activity of Opus Dei in Hungary began in a stable way in 1990. Since then, the Prelate has visited the faithful and friends of Opus Dei in Budapest on three occasions: in 1995, in 2005, and now in 2009.

On this occasion he was able to have various meetings with men and women, laity and priests. He also met with students who have been spending their university years in the Orbánhegy and Fenyvesliget student residences. “Many people here in Hungary are waiting for you to lead them to Christ. That is real friendship,” the Prelate told the students at Orbánhegy.

To a group of Hungarian diocesan priests he advised: “Be very faithful to the bishop, be good friends with your brothers in the priesthood—especially with those who are alone or sick—pray a lot for the others and especially for the Pope.”

Bishop Echevarría also went to pray at the church of St. Anne (Belvárosi Szent Anna Templom), which is entrusted to priests of the Prelature.

Bilbao and Pamplona, Spain, from March 20 to 26

On Friday, the 20th, the Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Bilbao. After visiting Bishop Ricardo Blazquez, the diocesan bishop, he placed his intentions at the feet of Our Lady of Begoña.

On Saturday, the 21st, he took part in the Fourth Conference on “Catholics and Public Life,” organized by the Catholic Association for the
Propagation of the Faith, in the Palacio Euskalduna. In his lecture he stressed the need for Christians to confront the great problems of the contemporary world.[1]

He also had several get-togethers with faithful of Opus Dei, Cooperators and friends, both in Bilbao and in Pamplona. He encouraged them to feel the weight of the problems of society, with a life of prayer and service, in full faithfulness to and union with the Holy Father Benedict XVI.

*Japan, from April 14 to 17*

The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Japan on April 14. On Wednesday, April 15, he met with Archbishop Leo Jun Ikenaga of Osaka. During those days he also had various gatherings with groups of laity and priests. One of them was with students at Seido Cultural Center, in Ashiya, where he spoke about the faith to a public made up in large part of non-baptized persons. In Nagasaki, he went to Oura, the Church where Our Lady *de inventione Christianorum* [of the finding of the Christians] is venerated. He also took advantage of this trip to visit Archbishop Joseph Mitsuaki Takami, and to greet many people at the Mikawadai School.

*Taiwan, from April 21 to 24*

Bishop Echevarría also spent some days in Taipei (Taiwan), where he went to the Church of the Resurrection to pray before the pilgrim Virgin of Wanjin. Although this statue is usually found in the southern part of the island, it was brought temporarily to the capital to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Catholicism in Taiwan.

The Prelate summed up his memories of his trip to the Far East in his letter of May 1, 2009: “A few days ago I returned from a trip to Japan and Taiwan, where I was able to see once again how the spirit of Opus Dei is taking root in people of all races and cultures. In both countries, besides knowing myself accompanied by all of you, and praying with all of you, I had two very special reasons for joy, among many others. In Nagasaki, I had a chance to visit Oura, the shrine where the martyrs of that country are venerated and the loving memory of those who conserved the faith despite harsh persecution is kept alive. And then in Taipei, I was present for the Exposition and Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament in a church filled
with faithful.... In both places, there forcefully came to mind the thought that we have to bring Jesus, with Mary, to the furthest corner of the globe. Join me in giving thanks to the Most Blessed Trinity, source of all good, and to our Mother, the Blessed Virgin, through whose mediation we receive every grace.”

On the 23rd he visited Archbishop John Hung Shan-chuan of Taipei.

**Trips to L’Aquila**

During the night of April 5 an earthquake took place in the Abruzzo area of central Italy. “As soon as I received news this morning,” said the Prelate in a message of condolence to those affected, “of the powerful earthquake that shook the Abruzzo region, I raised my heart to God, through the intercession of St. Josemaría, in petition for the souls of the dead and for the speedy recovery of the injured.”

The catastrophe left 287 people dead, and tens of thousands homeless. A large number of temporary tents were set up in the area (the so-called “tentopolis”) to provide a provisional solution for the homeless.

Among the many buildings affected was the Tor D’Aveia International Center, the summer seat of the Roman College of the Holy Cross, located in San Felice D’Ocre. Together with his prayers for the suffering of so many persons, Bishop Echevarría made a number of trips to show his solidarity and to accompany and encourage those affected.

“I am convinced that St. Josemaría,” he said, “who passed through that beloved region so many times and who prayed so much for the men and women of Abruzzo, will intercede for them in a special way during these moments and gain from God the grace that the material and moral damage be as small as possible.”[2]

[1] See address on page 85.

Ordination as deacons of two faithful of the Prelature (February 21, 2009)

The Prelate of Opus Dei ordained as deacons two Associate faithful of the Prelature. The ceremony took place in the Church of St. Josemaría in Rome.

Ordination as priests of 30 deacons of the Prelature (May 23, 2009)

On Saturday, May 23, the Prelate of Opus Dei ordained 30 new priests in the Basilica of St. Eugene in Rome. The new priests come from 12 different countries.

[1] See homily on page 64.


Pastoral Letters

May 2009

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

This month of May falls entirely within Easter time. The joy of Christ’s Resurrection imbues the life of the Church, both on earth and in heaven. It is the gaudium cum pace, the joy and peace, that all of us have in our heart.

During these weeks we will contemplate our Lady, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, taken up in body and soul to heaven. We will see her “in the joy and the glory of the Resurrection. The tears shed at the foot of the Cross have been transformed into a smile which nothing can wipe away, even as her maternal compassion towards us remains unchanged. The intervention of the Virgin Mary in offering succor throughout history testifies to this, and does not cease to call forth, in the people of God, an unshakable confidence in her: the Memorare prayer expresses this
sentiment very well. Mary loves each of her children, giving particular attention to those who, like her Son at the hour of his Passion, are prey to suffering; she loves them quite simply because they are her children, according to the will of Christ on the Cross.”[1]

Let us meditate on these words of the Pope in order to go more deeply into the reasons for our devotion to our Lady and to give it new luster. The reasons are clear: Mary is the Mother of God and our Mother. Therefore we need to cultivate an ardent and tender Marian devotion, solidly based on the divine Revelation set forth by the Church’s Magisterium. Our beloved Don Álvaro recalled this in a letter that he wrote in 1987. Mary’s maternal mission, he told us, stems from a specific divine plan: “It is an undeniable fact that wherever the Church has taken root, through the grace of Christ and the tenacious and sacrificing effort of the evangelizers, the Mother of the Church is also present... As a result, gratitude to Mary is born and develops, and the fruitful plant of Marian devotion rises up. Giving clear testimony to this devotion are the churches and shrines that, like the bright trail of a comet, cover the landscape of the countries where the faith has taken root, infusing into the lives of Christians a home dimension that only the Most Holy Virgin can bring about.”[2]

What a great truth this is! We Christians form a family, the Holy Church, in which Jesus Christ is the first-born among many brethren,[3] and which has a Mother, Mary Most Holy. Jesus shows us the path we have to travel to reach holiness, full identification with him. And our Lady encourages us along the way, so that we can reach the goal: eternal life with God and with all the angels and saints.

Christian art expresses this graphically when it presents, for the veneration of the faithful, the image of Mary with the Child Jesus in her arms. By her attitude, by her gaze, our Mother seems to be telling us: look at my Son, your elder Brother, and follow his example in everything. Walk where he walked; foster in your heart the same redemptive longings that filled his heart; have compassion on your brothers and sisters as he had compassion on everyone.

In the coming days, many thousands of people will make pilgrimages to a great variety of places where our Lady is venerated, with the desire to
encounter Jesus once again, to become more like him, following the invitation of St. Josemaría to his daughters and sons in Opus Dei and to so many other people. The “May pilgrimage” is now a joyful reality all over the world, which we do without noise, following the footsteps of our Founder in his first pilgrimage, back in 1935. “I respect and love public demonstrations of devotion,” he wrote in a homily, but “I must admit I prefer to offer Mary the same affection, the same enthusiasm, in private visits or with very few people—a more intimate sort of thing.”[4]

Often this pilgrimage will have as its goal a site close to where we live, perhaps in the same city or nearby. In some cases—for example, for those who are the sick or disabled—it won’t even be possible to leave home. But even then one can carry out a May pilgrimage of our Lady. The important thing is not the physical movement from one place to another, but the interior journey of the soul, which spurs us to draw closer to Mary, and therefore closer to Jesus.

Pope John Paul II emphasized that, in the Marian sites spread all over the world, one can sense a special presence of our Mother. These sites, countless in number, are found in a great variety of forms: from small oratories in homes and niches along the streets, where an image of the Mother of God shines brightly, to the chapels and churches constructed in her honor. Nevertheless, there come to mind certain sites where people sense our Mother’s presence in an especially vivid way: the Marian shrines and sanctuaries. “In all these places, the special legacy of the Crucified Lord is made a marvelous reality. There one surrenders and entrusts oneself to Mary; we go there to be with her as with our Mother. We open our heart to her and speak to her about everything; we ‘take her into our home,’ that is, we bring her into all our problems.”[5]

The faithful go there to visit Mary with the desire to find or strengthen “their faith and to nourish it. They seek the sacraments of the Church, particularly reconciliation with God and Eucharistic nourishment. And they set off again strengthened, grateful to our Lady, Mother of God and our Mother.”[6]

We all treasure this experience. Who has not experienced a greater closeness to God, after having visited our Lady with the spirit of prayer and
penance that our Father taught us. Who has not tangibly felt the effectiveness of recourse to Mary, to revive the faith of a person who needs it, to help them get closer to God, to open up broader horizons for someone who is putting up resistance to God’s call to a generous dedication? Jesus wants his grace to reach us through Mary. Therefore “it is not a trifling matter to stop visiting the shrines built for her by her children’s love, nor to pass by her image without greeting her affectionately. It is not a trifling matter to let time go by without singing the loving serenade of the Holy Rosary, a song of faith, the nuptial song of a soul that finds Jesus through Mary.”[7] Let us each ask ourselves: How can I improve in my glances at images of our Mother? How can I better savor each Hail Mary, the Hail Holy Queen, the Regina Caeli? To whom can I speak about Mary’s love and about love for Mary?

These and other Marian devotions can help adorn the month of May. The essential thing is to draw ever closer to Jesus, through the path that his Blessed Mother points out to us. Every encounter with our Lady becomes an invitation to look at Christ. As Benedict XVI said at a Marian shrine:” For one who is searching, this summons repeatedly turns into a spontaneous plea, a plea addressed especially to Mary, who has given us Christ as her Son: ‘Show us Jesus!’ Let us make this prayer today with our whole heart; let us make this prayer above and beyond the present moment, as we inwardly seek the Face of the Redeemer. ‘Show us Jesus!’ Mary responds, showing him to us in the first instance as a child. God has made himself small for us.”[8]

Let us consider once more some words that St. Josemaría wrote back in the 1930’s, words that have helped thousands of people to set out on the paths of contemplation in ordinary life: “if you want to be great, become little...The beginning of the way, at the end of which you will find yourself completely carried away with love for Jesus, is a trusting love for Mary.

“Do you want to love our Lady? —Well, get to know her. How? —By praying her Rosary well.”[9]

Attentively considering and praying the mysteries of the Rosary sets before our eyes the key moments in the life of Jesus and of Mary. Thus it becomes easier to walk securely on the path that leads to heaven. We will
rectify our course if necessary, and show those accompanying us the sure “short cut” to eternal happiness. As we contemplate those scenes, we come to understand “how through the assent of the humble handmaid of the Lord, mankind begins its return to God and sees in the glory of the all-holy Virgin the goal towards which it is journeying.”[10]

We can also put care into other small signs of affection for our Lady. I highlight once again a practice proper to persons in love, which St. Josemaría spread everywhere: greeting affectionately the images of our Lady that we see every day—on a street or in a square, inside a church, in a room at home…. And we can accompany our glance with an aspiration as a very personal expression of our filial love. Our Father always did this, putting special effort into greeting the images of our Lady where he lived or worked. This was an expression of his filial affection, and reflected what he had deep in his soul: sorrowful glances, or thankful or beseeching ones, depending on the circumstances, but always expressions of true love.

He also used to advise people to carry a picture of our Lady in their wallet or purse (as one carries photographs of loved ones) in order to have her always very present, and direct affectionate compliments to her. He felt great joy at having helped to fill the world with pictures of our Lady. “In Opus Dei,” he said, “we have constantly shown our love for our Lady by placing millions of her images throughout the world, fostering practices of Marian piety on all the continents: in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in North and South America, in Oceania; bringing young people along this path, freely. Without freedom, no.

“But this is only natural. How could we not love the Mother of God, who is our Mother? Besides, we need her. I need her! Like a small child who, when he is afraid of the dark at night, calls out: Mama! I have to cry out often with my heart, without the sound of words: Mother! Mama, don’t abandon me.

“The interior life is like this: naturalness, simplicity. I can’t live in any other way. I have to live like a man. And before God, who is eternal, I am a tiny child who is worth nothing.”[11]

The Liturgy applies some words from a psalm to our Lady. “The psalmist, seeing from afar this maternal bond which unites the Mother of
Christ with the people of faith, prophesies regarding the Virgin Mary that “the richest of the people … will seek your smile” (Ps 44:13). In this way, prompted by the inspired word of Scripture, Christians have always sought the smile of our Lady, this smile which medieval artists were able to represent and show with such marvelous skill. This smile of Mary is for all men and women,” says Benedict XVI, “but it is directed quite particularly to those who suffer, so that they can find comfort and solace therein. To seek Mary’s smile is not an act of devotional or outmoded sentimentality, but rather the proper expression of the living and profoundly human relationship which binds us to her whom Christ gave us as our Mother.”[12]

Let us entrust to our Lady all those who are suffering, in soul or in body: the sick, those who feel lonely or abandoned, those who have been victims of natural calamities, those who are undergoing persecution and violence of any kind… No one should remain outside of our prayer.

Let us pray especially (I remind you of this every month, because it is an ever-present need) for the Pope and his intentions, and now for the fruit of his trip to the Holy Land from the 8th to the 15th of this month. Let us also pray for the faithful of the Prelature who will receive priestly ordination on the 23rd, eve of the Solemnity of the Ascension, which in many countries is celebrated on Sunday the 24th. Let us ask the Holy Spirit, on the upcoming feast of Pentecost, the last day in May, to pour forth his gifts abundantly on the Church and on the world, and to prepare the hearts of everyone to receive them.

A few days ago I returned from a trip to Japan and Taiwan, where I was able to see once again how the spirit of Opus Dei is taking root in people of all races and cultures. In both countries, besides knowing myself accompanied by all of you, and praying with all of you, I had two very special reasons for joy, among many others. In Nagasaki, I had a chance to visit Oura, the shrine where the martyrs of that country are venerated and the loving memory of those who conserved the faith despite harsh persecution is kept alive. And then in Taipei, I was present for the Exposition and Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament in a church filled with faithful. (We had just gone into a church with a pilgrim image of our Lady and we found ourselves in that Eucharistic act.) In both places, there forcefully came to mind the thought that we have to bring Jesus, with
Mary, to the furthest corner of the globe. Join me in giving thanks to the Most Blessed Trinity, source of all good, and to our Mother, the Blessed Virgin, through whose mediation we receive every grace. And also to St. Josemaría (the 17th is the anniversary of his beatification) for having been a very faithful instrument of God for the carrying out of such an abundant sowing of holiness, doctrine and charity throughout the world.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, May 1, 2009


June 2009

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

Yesterday we celebrated the solemnity of Pentecost, which this year coincided with the end of the month of May. As at the first Pentecost, our Lady has helped us prepare for a new outpouring of the Paraclete. Now, as we begin Ordinary Time once more, we can find in this circumstance a new invitation to sanctify our ordinary everyday life, interwoven with hours of work and the multiple relations occasioned by our family and social life. What our Father taught us is once again a reality: the external circumstances of our work do not change, and yet, at the same time, each day our work does change, because of the new love that we put into it!

Our daily life truly marks out for us the field of our struggle, spurred and sustained by grace, to identify ourselves ever more fully with Christ, and thus to be better sons and daughters of God. As St. Josemaría stressed so clearly in one of his homilies: “when a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God. That is why I have told you repeatedly, and hammered away once and again on the idea that the Christian vocation consists of making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.”[1] I can still hear the echo of the force with which he spoke the words “hammered away,” because our Father was a great teacher both in word and in deed, so that the spirit God had placed in his soul would be deeply engraved in us.

Carrying out our daily actions with love for God and neighbor: that is the secret of the holiness to which God is calling Christians who live and work in the middle of temporal realities. This path is possible for us because, as Sacred Scripture teaches, God has taken the initiative: we love him because he loved us first.[2] It makes me happy to recall this as we begin the month of June, during which—in so many different ways—the liturgy stresses God’s love for his creatures. We have considered this carefully in celebrating the principle mysteries of the history of salvation: the Incarnation, Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, his Resurrection and
glorious Ascension into heaven. In the coming weeks “the liturgy has us celebrate three feasts that have a ‘synthetic’ character: the Most Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi and, finally, the Sacred Heart of Jesus.” [3] These days, so significant for those who know themselves to be sons and daughters of God, are presented to us as manifestations of God’s love for mankind, and thus are a synthesis of all the salvific mysteries.

On Sunday, the seventh, we celebrate the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. With this great feast, the Church invites us to consider the mystery of the intimate life of the one God, who wanted to reveal himself gradually through the prophets and who manifested himself fully in Christ. Already in the Old Testament, before Moses on Mount Sinai, he showed himself to be a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.[4] This declaration was the first explicit manifestation of the riches contained in the name of Yahweh, revealed earlier to Moses.[5] At the same time, this ineffable Name continued to be wrapped in veils of mystery. Only in the New Testament was the intimate life of God made present to us with greater clarity. St. John, the beloved disciple of our Lord, who rested his head on the Master’s heart at the Last Supper, wrote—inspired by the Holy Spirit—that God’s deepest identity can be summed up in a single word: Love. Deus caritas est, God is Love.[6] And as a clear sign he sent us his Son: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.[7]

Benedict XVI said that this name, Love, “clearly expresses that the God of the Bible is not some kind of ‘monad’ closed in on himself and satisfied with his own self-sufficiency. Rather he is life that wants to communicate itself, openness, relationship. Words like ‘merciful,’ ‘compassionate,’ ‘rich in grace’ all speak to us of a relationship, in particular of a Being filled with life who offers himself, who wants to fill every gap, every shortage, who wants to give and to forgive, who desires to establish a solid and lasting bond.”[8] Since he is Love by essence, our God is not a solitary Being, enclosed in transcendent distance, foreign to mankind’s concerns. God is a trinity of Persons, so deeply united and co-penetrated that they are one single God. “This revelation of God is fully delineated in the New Testament though the word of Christ. Jesus showed us the Face
of God, one in Essence and Triune in Persons: God is Love, Father Love, Son Love, Holy Spirit Love.”[9]

In revealing to us the mystery of his intimate life, God—to express it in some way—has shown us his face. He has communicated to us that he wants to take us into his friendship, even more, that he wants to make us his sons and daughters, sharers in his own Life. For these reasons, the liturgical solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity celebrates the supreme revelation of divine Love. That is why St. Josemaría recommended that all Christians strive to get to know and converse with each of the divine Persons. “Learn to praise the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Learn to have a special devotion to the Most Blessed Trinity: I believe in God the Father, I believe in God the Son, I believe in God the Holy Spirit: I believe in the Most Blessed Trinity. I hope in God the Father, I hope in God the Son, I hope in God the Holy Spirit: I hope in the Most Blessed Trinity. I love God the Father, I love God the Son, I love God the Holy Spirit: I love the Most Blessed Trinity. This devotion is needed as a supernatural exercise, expressed in movements of the heart, although not always in words.”[10]

May we truly strive to deal with our God in this way. How do we seek out his presence throughout the day? Do we frequently consider that we are his children? Do we strive to imitate Jesus, our elder Brother and our Model? Do we invoke the Paraclete with silent cries, asking that he sanctify us and fill us with apostolic zeal? Is our friendship with the Holy Spirit growing?

The solemnity of Corpus Christi, on the 11th (which in some places is moved to the following Sunday, June 14), helps to reinforce these deep aspirations of a Christian soul. Pointing to the various moments of this liturgical celebration, the Holy Father sums up its fundamental meaning as follows: “First of all we gather around the altar of the Lord, to be together in his presence; secondly, there will be the procession, that is walking with the Lord; and lastly, kneeling before the Lord, adoration, which already begins in the Mass and accompanies the entire procession but culminates in the final moment of the Eucharistic Blessing when we all prostrate ourselves before the One who stooped down to us and gave his life for us.”[11]
Benedict XVI suggests an interior path that is valid not only for Corpus Christi but for our whole life. Let us not slacken in our determination to follow it with greater tenacity in the upcoming weeks, with an efficacious desire to take advantage of the graces that this solemnity brings to our souls, with a hunger to be essentially Eucharistic. Daily participation in the Holy Sacrifice has to be for us a recharging of our spiritual energy, which will spur us to maintain a more habitual and trusting intimacy with the Most Blessed Trinity throughout the day. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle will help us to keep alive and vibrant our love for God and neighbor, made tangible in deeds of fraternal concern, perhaps in small points but always very specific: with our family, with our colleagues at work, with our friends, with those we encounter for one reason or another. We know that our Father drew all his strength from the Holy Mass. And therefore, when he had to stay in bed because of sickness, his first concern on the day he could get up was: “I'm hungry to celebrate Mass!”—a disposition that he fostered every day.

The reference to the Tabernacle has to be for us, above all, a stimulus to nourish our love for God, in just correspondence to God’s love for us. We can draw a lot of light from considering the personal experience of St. Josemaría, who, in the midst of the most absorbing work, was always close to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. “Whenever I enter an oratory I pause to tell our Lord: Jesus, I love you. And I praise the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are present in the Blessed Sacrament with Christ’s Sacred Humanity. For wherever one divine Person is found, the entire Trinity is also present. And I ‘toss’ a few affectionate words (as though I were tossing a flower) to my Mother Holy Mary. Then I remember to greet the angels, who are guarding the tabernacle in a vigil of love, of adoration, of reparation, rendering homage to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I thank them for being there all day and all night, since I can only be there in my heart: thank you, blessed angels, for always rendering homage and accompanying Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament!”[12]

There’s no need to add anything more. I’m sure that seeing our Father open his heart in this way will spur each and every one of us to foster the hunger, the eagerness, the fervent desire to improve in how we treat Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.
Thus we will arrive very well prepared for the third liturgical solemnity, that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in which the immensity of God’s Love is eloquently manifested to us. “When we talk about the Heart of Jesus,” wrote St. Josemaría, “we stress the certainty of God’s love and the truth of his commitment to us.”[13] What greater proof could he give us, than to show us his Heart pierced by a lance, open wide as an invitation to rest in him, to find in him our refuge in moments of suffering or tribulation? We want, besides, to make reparation for the sins with which he is offended: our own and those of so many people who fail to recognize the greatness of his sacrifice for every man and woman, without exception.

That day we also begin the “Year for Priests” that Benedict XVI has proclaimed for the universal Church, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé of Ars. Let us try to encourage everyone we can, beginning with the faithful of the Prelature and all who benefit from its apostolates, to be “on the front lines,” together with the Pope and the bishops, praying that the Church never lack many and holy priests.

On June 29, the solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the Pauline Year will conclude. Throughout these months, in meditating on the life and teachings of the Apostle to the Gentiles, we have learned to love our Lord more, with a love that teaches us the root of true freedom. Saul learned this on the road to Damascus, when he saw the glorified Jesus. From that moment on, “he speaks and acts spurred by the responsibility of love.”[14] He feels sovereignly free, with the freedom of love. “In the same spirit,” explains the Pope, “Augustine formulated the phrase that later became famous: Dilige et quod vis fac (Tract. in 1 Jn 7:7–8), ‘love and do what you please.’ The one who loves Christ as Paul loved him can truly do as he pleases because his love is united to Christ’s will and thus with God’s will.”[15]

I won’t stop to comment on other feasts and anniversaries that fall in this month: the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the anniversary of the ordination of the first priests of the Work, the liturgical feast of St. Josemaría…. Each of these dates can and should be a new impulse to intensify our dedication to God and to others for God, and our apostolic zeal, with specific deeds.
Continue praying for all my intentions, especially for the beginning of the Prelature’s stable apostolic work in Indonesia, Romania and Korea.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, June 1, 2009


[9] Ibid.


[14] Benedict XVI, Homily at the Opening of the Pauline Year, June 28, 2008

[15] Ibid.
January 2009

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

During the Christmas season, we also turn our eyes to our Lady, completely immersed in caring for her newborn Son. How lovingly she takes him in her arms at Bethlehem and looks after all his needs! Later, during the years spent in Nazareth, Mary tried to never leave his side. She helped St. Joseph in the human growth of the Son of God, providing her affection, and she learned from his conduct and words as the first and best disciple of the Master. Now our Lady looks after us—each and every one of us—with the affection and dedication with which she cared for her Son, because on the Cross Jesus confirmed her in her true spiritual maternity over the men and women of all times. From that moment, Mary has not ceased to care for all mankind, and especially for her most needy children. Therefore as we begin the new year, on the Solemnity of Mary’s divine Motherhood, the Church invites us to meditate on our Lady’s loving concern for us and to thank her for all her signs of affection.

The Incarnation of the Word, as we profess in the Creed, was carried out through the action of the Holy Spirit, with the free and full cooperation of the Virgin Mary. By this Mystery, which culminated in the Cross and Resurrection, God saved us from our sins and granted us the gift of divine filiation. During the past few days we have read in St. Paul, the great herald of Christ and the Gospel, some words addressed to the Galatians that contain a treasure of doctrine. The Apostle writes: “when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

In this Pauline year, let us put our hearts into considering some of the principal points that the Apostle to the Gentiles has passed on to us. “We have before us,” the Pope said a few months ago, “a giant, not only in terms of his actual apostolate but also of his extraordinarily profound and stimulating theological teaching.” It is he, together with St. John, who has spoken to us the most about the Holy Spirit, about his action in the Church and in Christians. I would like to touch on some aspects of that teaching in this letter, so that we may enter more deeply into the central
role of the Paraclete in the intense development of Christian life, the goal to which we must aspire.

Reading the Acts of the Apostles shows us how the Holy Spirit has guided the Church from its first moments. His action, as we read in this book, is clearly manifest in the life of St. Paul. Everything in the Apostle’s life, from his conversion to his martyrdom, is marked by the Paraclete’s action. Through grace, God chooses and consecrates him, together with Barnabas, for the expansion of Christianity among the gentiles. The Holy Spirit guides him during his apostolic trips, and spurs him to evangelize Europe; he tells him that he has to give witness to Christ in Jerusalem and even in Rome itself.[4] “In a word, his presence and his action are everywhere.”[5] The intervention of the Sanctifier in early Christianity is so obvious that the Acts of the Apostles has come to be called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.

Let us never doubt it: we will grow greatly in our contemplative spirit, in our apostolic efficacy, if we invoke him more each day, if we ask him to guide us with his grace. How intent are you to give a supernatural tone to your actions? How devoutly do you pray the Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto? Do you feel the need to put yourself in his hands, each time you mention his Name?

St. Paul, in his epistles, “did not limit himself to describing the dynamic and active dimension of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, but also analyzed his presence in the lives of Christians.”[6] Jesus had announced that the Father and he himself would dwell in the souls of those who accepted his word and loved him. And he added: “These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”[7] Inspired by God, St. Paul, in reflecting on the Spirit, “not only explained his influence on the action of Christians, but also on their being. Indeed, it is he who said that the Spirit of God dwells in us” (cf. Rom 8: 9; I Cor 3: 16) and that “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal 4: 6).[8]

“We know that the entire Trinity dwells in the soul of the just person through grace. But his presence in the men and women who walk in God’s
friendship is attributed in a special way to the Sanctifier. The traditional reason is quite easy to understand: since sanctification is the effect of God's love, it is only natural to attribute that operation to the Person who, in the intimacy of the Trinity, is subsistent Love, the Holy Spirit—just as analogically we attribute creation to the Father and redemption to the Word, although all that God works in relation to the world is done inseparably by the three divine Persons. The Blessed Trinity penetrates us to the very depths of our being, not only as creatures but also by letting us share through grace in the intimate divine life, as children of the Father, in the Son through the Holy Spirit.”[9]

“As the Second Vatican Council teaches: ‘Such is the nature and the greatness of the mystery of man as enlightened for the faithful by Christian revelation. It is therefore through Christ, and in Christ, that light is thrown on the riddle of suffering and death which, apart from his Gospel, overwhelms us. Christ has risen, destroying death by his death, and has given life abundantly to us so that, becoming sons in the Son, we may cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father!”[10]

“The gift of divine filiation is the greatest gift we could receive from God. This is our greatest dignity: to be not merely images but also children of God. And it is an invitation to live our sonship, to be increasingly aware that we are adoptive sons in God’s great family. It is an invitation, the Holy Father urges us, to transform this objective gift into a subjective reality, decisive for our way of thinking, acting and being.”[11]

How grateful we should be to St. Paul, God’s chosen instrument to make known to us with new splendor this foundational truth of our Christian faith. In his epistle to the Galatians, after recalling that the Word became man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin so that we might become children of God, he adds: And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir. [12] As St. Thomas Aquinas writes: “Just as the effect of the mission of the Son was to lead us to the Father, so also the effect of the sending of the Holy Spirit is to lead the faithful to the Son.”[13]
Acknowledging this gift and behaving in a way that is consistent with it is, as St. Josemaría taught, “the greatest rebellion of men, who refuse to live like animals, who are dissatisfied and restless until they know their Creator and are on intimate terms with him.”[14] And he added: “Slavery or divine sonship, this is the dilemma we face. Children of God or slaves to pride, to sensuality, to the fretful selfishness which seems to afflict so many souls.”[15]

God wanted to make the real and lively awareness of our divine filiation the foundation of the spirit of Opus Dei. This is what our Founder always told us. He even recalled, as he often said, the exact moment when our Lord engraved this truth with fire in his soul. “This characteristic feature of our spirit was born with the Work, and took shape in 1931. During some difficult moments humanly speaking, when I was nonetheless certain of what seemed impossible (which you now see made a reality), I felt God acting within me, implanting in my heart and on my lips with imperative force the tender invocation, Abba! Pater! I was in the street, on a tram. For the street doesn’t hinder our contemplative dialogue. The hubbub of the world is, for us, a place of prayer. I probably prayed those words out loud, and people must have thought I was crazy: Abba! Pater! What trust, what peace and optimism it will give you, in the midst of difficulties, to feel yourselves children of a Father, who knows everything, and can do everything.”[16]

St. Josemaría recommended that all of us consider this truth frequently each day. He encouraged us to meditate on St. Paul’s teaching: “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 we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”[17]

It is always the right time to go more deeply into our divine filiation, but during these days this reality is even more accessible. It is enough to look at the Christ Child lying in the manger, in the arms of his Mother or in those of St. Joseph. Our God made himself a helpless and defenseless child so that we might be, and feel ourselves deeply to be, children of God, and draw close to him without any fear. If ever, for any reason, this is difficult for us, let us go to our Lady and to St. Joseph, asking them to teach
us how to draw close to God with the trust and intimacy that they showed him. Let us beseech the Paraclete, who dwells in our soul, to put into our hearts that cry—Abba! Pater!—so that, with the gift of piety, he will make us savor deeply the reality of our divine filiation.

In his catechesis Benedict XVI stressed “another typical aspect of the Spirit which St Paul teaches us: his connection with love. Thus, the Apostle wrote: “Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5)...The Spirit immerses us in the very rhythm of divine life, which is a life of love, enabling us to share personally in relations between the Father and the Son.”[18]

Let us consider carefully the significance of these words. Thanks to the Paraclete, who makes us children of God in Christ, we have been “introduced” into the beatific and beatifying Life of the Holy Trinity. We, poor creatures, created from the dust of the earth, can beat with the rhythm of the Heart of God. “The Spirit makes us Christ-like by his sanctifying power. He is truly the form or structure, as it were, of Christ our Savior, and he imprints upon us the image of God.”[19]

The solemnity of Epiphany and the feast of our Lord’s Baptism speak to us of the constant action of the Holy Spirit. He guided the three wise men to Bethlehem, and descended visibly on our Lord in the Jordan, showing that Jesus was the longed-for Messiah. Let us learn to open our hearts to his sanctifying grace. Let us ponder more frequently the invitation that resounded while Jesus was being baptized by John: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”[20] And at the moment of the Transfiguration, with renewed insistence: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”[21] To enter into that dialogue, to draw practical consequences from the teachings of the Master, from his gestures and words, we have to respond with exquisite docility to the action of the Holy Spirit. He will lead us to discover, with greater fullness, the possibility and the need of sanctifying ordinary life, with the awareness that all of our conduct has to be summed up in speaking with God and speaking to souls about God.
The anniversary of St. Josemaría’s birth, on the 9th of January, and of his baptism, on the 13th, also speak to us of the Paraclete’s nearness. Let us take advantage of our Father’s intercession to strive for a complete faithfulness, like that which St. Josemaría sought all through his life, by welcoming all the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

I know you also will have very much in mind that on January 21 we celebrate another anniversary of the first St. Raphael Circle: all of us were among those three, three thousand, three hundred thousand, three million…. May we never forget that, if we want it, our Lord will also make it possible for each of us to be apostolically effective, if we are “essentially” Eucharistic.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, January 1, 2009


At the Mass in suffrage for Bishop del Portillo, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (March 30, 2009)

At the Mass for Bishop Álvaro del Portillo,
St. Eugene's Basilica

My dear brothers and sisters:

1. With this celebration of the Eucharist, we are recalling today the fifteenth anniversary of the death, on March 23, 1994, of the Servant of
God Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Prelate of Opus Dei. We are doing so in the final days of Lent, as Holy Week is drawing near.

The opening prayer of the Mass sets before us the fruit we hope to obtain from this celebration. We ask God the Father that, with the Gift of his love, he fill us with all blessings; and we beseech him: “Help us to pass from our old life of sin to the new life of grace. Prepare us for the glory of your kingdom.”[1] The Latin text reads: *in novitatem a vetustate transire*. In this transformation we find the deepest meaning, not only of the Paschal feast, but of our entire Christian life.

What is, in fact, true death—the death of the soul—if not being separated from God by sin? The texts from Sacred Scripture speak to us of this spiritual death, much more serious than bodily death. In the first reading God, through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, speaks to the chosen people, that is, to us as well, to tell us: *Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel.*[2] This is not a reference to temporal life, but to the eternal Life that is the possession of himself. Therefore he promises to those who listen to him: *I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live... then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it.*[3]

2. With these words God fills our hearts with confidence. The evils that we might experience during the course of our present life, including death, do not have the final word. The final word is that pronounced by the love of God our Father, manifested fully in Christ, his only-begotten Son, who took on our flesh, died and rose from the dead, to free us from our sins and give us eternal life.

Pope Benedict XVI has recalled this on various occasions, especially during this year dedicated to St. Paul. In the presence of the Cross—which today, as in the times of Paul, is seen by many as a scandal and madness[4]—the Pope insists that “the Cross reveals ‘the power of God’ (cf. 1 Cor1: 24), which is different from human power; indeed, it reveals his love: ‘For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men’ (ibid., v. 25). Centuries after Paul we see that in history it was the Cross that triumphed and not the wisdom that opposed it. The Crucified One is wisdom, for he truly shows who God is, that is, a
force of love which went even as far as the Cross to save men and women. God uses ways and means that seem to us at first sight to be merely weakness. The Crucified One reveals on the one hand man’s frailty, and on the other, the true power of God, that is, the free gift of love: it is this totally gratuitous love that is true wisdom.”[5]

These considerations are very opportune in remembering Don Álvaro, who loved God’s will with a persevering faithfulness, even when it brought suffering and obstacles. Yes, the sufferings of our present life are instruments which divine Wisdom makes use of to purify our souls, just as a sculptor brings forth from the shapeless rock the masterpiece that we can later admire.

In this regard, there come to mind some words of St. Josemaría, in whose school Don Álvaro learned to love the Cross. The founder of Opus Dei wrote: “The great Christian revolution has been to convert pain into fruitful suffering and to turn a bad thing into something good. We have deprived the devil of this weapon; and with it we can conquer eternity.”[6] With the condition, however (we can add, explaining the words of St. Josemaría), that we know how to unite our sufferings, without exaggerating them, to Christ’s Cross, offering them with patience and love as reparation for our sins and for the sins of all mankind.

3. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.[7] The words from the Psalm, which we have heard and meditated on many times, fill us with a firm optimism. Jesus is guiding and protecting us. How could we ever doubt his love, if he is the Good Shepherd, who gives his life for his sheep, for each one of us?[8]

In regard to the narration of the resurrection of Lazarus, I would like to emphasize one aspect that awakened, both in St. Josemaría and in Don Álvaro, feelings of great tenderness and strong security: the tears of Christ, perfect God and perfect man, for his dead friend. So clear is our Lord’s affection that those who were present, sharing in his sisters’ sorrow, exclaimed: see how he loved him![9]

The founder of Opus Dei used this passage from the Gospel to stress how great Jesus’ love for us is. In The Way he wrote: “Jesus is your friend.
The Friend. With a human heart, like yours. With loving eyes that wept for Lazarus. And he loves you as much as he loved Lazarus.”[10]

Christ’s tears are for us a school where we can learn many things. In first place, they teach us to be men and women capable of being moved, who have compassion for others and seek to remedy their sufferings, to the extent possible, or at least try to console them. A sincere word of encouragement, of understanding, of solidarity, is always a true manifestation of Christian charity.

His tears also teach us that, when facing the death of our loved ones, it is natural to show our feelings, but without exaggerating them. A Christian knows that with bodily death *vita mutatur, non tollitur*; life is changed, not lost, as we say in the Preface of the Mass for the dead.[11] There is always room for Christian joy: ours has to be a calm sorrow, tempered by faith in eternal life.

4. We have also heard in the Gospel narrative that Martha went out to meet our Lord. At first she complains to the Master about her brother’s death: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!* But she immediately adds: *And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.*[12] We see a progressive growth in Martha’s faith when our Lord directs that decisive question to her: *I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?* At that moment, from Martha’s heart and soul there breaks forth a marvelous act of faith: She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.”[13]

Let us ask Jesus to grant us a similar faith. With this faith, united to hope and love, we will be in a position to carry out wonders in our family, in our workplace, and with our friends, and we will bring many people to know and love our Lord. Among the various works of mercy, I would like to mention one that Don Álvaro especially loved: bringing others to the sacrament of Penance. This is the best way to help them prepare themselves very well for the feast of Easter.

The Gospel passage concludes with Lazarus’ resurrection. I would like to cite here some other words of St. Josemaría that we can apply to our own
life and also share with others, if we should ever fail to behave as good sons and daughters of God: “Never despair. Lazarus was dead and decaying: ‘By this time there will be an odor, for he has been buried four days,’ Martha says to Jesus. If you hear God’s inspiration and follow it—‘Lazarus, come forth!’—you will come back to Life.”[14]

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin, our Mother, to obtain for us the grace of reaching Easter well prepared, full of contrition for our sins and of hope for the great victory won by Christ. This will also be a very good way to remember Bishop Álvaro del Portillo on this anniversary. And, as is only logical, let us pray especially for the Roman Pontiff and for all those who assist him in governing the Church. May the Pope feel sustained by our prayer and our filial love. Amen.

[1] Collect prayer for Monday of the Fifth week of Lent.
At the Missa in Coena Domini of Holy Thursday, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 9, 2009)

On Holy Thursday
In Coena Domini,
Prelatic Church of
Our Lady of Peace

My dear brothers, my dear children.

1. All those who have seriously striven for holiness have cultivated a deep devotion to the Holy Eucharist. This divine Mystery, the sacramental actualization of the Sacrifice of the Cross, gives us a glimpse of how much the Blessed Trinity loves us: through our Communion with the Body of the Lord, God grants us the great gift of sharing in the divine life.

It is easy to see why God has provided that, while we walk on this earth, we do not contemplate Him face to face: such an enormous joy would never fit in our hearts, which would be broken apart by that infinite gift. To make up for our incapacity, Jesus hides Himself under the sacramental Species and, at the same time, through them, manifests His real Presence. In this way, we can speak with Him, filling ourselves with His Love, drawing strength every day for our life as Christians.

The adoration we owe to the Blessed Sacrament is thus a logical consequence of our limitation and the infinite love of God. It helps us to be more detached and readies us to be divinized and to let go of ourselves with the confidence and joy of God’s own children. Moreover, as Pope Benedict XVI explains, Eucharistic adoration “is the most radical and effective remedy for idolatries past and the present. Kneeling before the Eucharist is a profession of freedom: whoever bows before Jesus cannot and should not prostrate himself before any earthly power, no matter how strong. Christians kneel before God, before the Blessed Sacrament, because we know and believe that the one true God, who created the world and loved it to the point of giving his only Son, is present there.”[1]
2. Je vous ai appelés amis (Jn15:15), dit Jésus à chacun d'entre nous. Il nous prouve son amitié par le service: il lave les pieds des disciples et il reste avec nous dans l'Eucharistie. Il se fait tout à tous, il se donne sans réserve à chacun.

Après qu'il leur eut lavé les pieds et repris son vêtement, il se remit à table et leur dit: — Comprenez-vous ce que je vous ai fait? Vous m'appelez le Maître et le Seigneur, et vous dites bien, car je le suis. Si donc moi, le Seigneur et le Maître, je vous ai lavé les pieds, vous devez vous-aussi vous laver les pieds les uns aux autres. (Jn 13:12-14). Saint Josémaria était ému lorsqu'il contemplait cette scène. Personnellement cette délicatesse de notre Christ m'émeut. Parce qu'il n'affirme pas: si je m'occupe de cela que ne devrez-vous pas faire de plus? Il se met au même niveau, il ne force pas: il justifie affectueusement le manque de générosité des ces hommes.[2]

Seul Jésus Christ est l'authentique Seigneur, au-dessus de tous et de tout; cependant, il s'est fait notre serviteur. Disons-lui: Seigneur, apprends-moi à être humble! Fais que je me décide à servir les autres, dans ma famille, parmi mes amis et mes, dans la vie ordinaire avec les autres. Rends-moi humble, Jésus; fais que je piétine toute manifestation d'orgueil, de présomption. Aujourd'hui c'est un bon jour pour renouveler ces résolutions.

Si nous nous comportons de la sorte, nous ne nous attribuions aucun mérite: tout est le fruit de la grâce en nous; ainsi l'on voit que le chrétien, sur les traces du Christ, se convertit vraiment en frère de tous les hommes, sans exception. Apprenons à être des hommes d'unité, pour que vraiment personne ne reste loin de la chaleur et de l'amitié du Seigneur, parce que nous sommes cohérents avec le fait que nous nous disons amis de Jésus Christ.

3. Dobbiamo trarre spunto dal Triduo pasquale per volgere più intensamente il nostro sguardo verso Gesù Cristo. Egli ci ha chiamati amici, come fece con gli Apostoli. Permettimi di fare una domanda: fino a che punto ti senti amico di Gesù? Considera che la tua deve essere un'amicizia sincera, senza condizioni. Altrimenti non sarebbe amicizia; sarebbe, al massimo, una certa simpatia. La vera amicizia crea un legame di unione, spinge a condividere gli ideali dell'altro facendoli propri per mezzo dell'abnegazione e del sacrificio, ogni volta che sia necessario.

Esaminati: com’è il tuo zelo apostolico, che è segno del tuo amore e della tua gratitudine verso Dio? Sentirsi strettamente vincolato all’amicizia del Signore, impegnato a fare apostolato, è un privilegio, non un dovere oneroso. Dobbiamo essere luce per le persone che ci conoscono od osservano il nostro modo di agire. Il Fondatore dell’Opus Dei fu profondamente colpito da queste parole di San Paolo: caritas Christi urget nos! (2 Cor 5, 14); le anime, tutte, esigono da noi che mostriamo loro Cristo con la nostra vita e con la nostra parola. Oggi vediamo come Gesù si fa nostro servo: facciamoci anche noi servitori degli altri.

4. Jesús —el Maestro, el Amigo—, ha enseñado siempre con sus obras y sus palabras (cfr. Heb 1, 1), tanto en los momentos extraordinarios —como el que hoy conmemoramos— como en las circunstancias ordinarias de cada jornada. En la celebración de su última Pascua ha convocado a los suyos. Y, como aconsejaba nuestro Padre —pues el Evangelio es y será siempre actual—, también nosotros nos metemos en la escena, sabiéndonos ahora protagonistas de esa Pascua que se perpetúa a lo largo de los tiempos.

Jesucristo nos pide que sepamos amar a todos los hombres, como Él nos ha amado. “Como a los primeros doce, también a nosotros el Señor puede insinuarnos y nos insinúa continuamente: exemplum dedi vobis (Jn 13, 5), os he dado ejemplo de humildad. Me he convertido en siervo, para que vosotros sepáis, con el corazón manso y humilde, servir a todos los hombres.”[3] Sí, todo el mundo está muy necesitado de caridad, de comprensión. En la reunión de la última Cena vemos que el amor de Cristo a los demás incluye la práctica de la corrección fraterna. Precisamente porque ama con perfección a cada uno de los suyos, no tiene inconveniente en llamarles la atención, al ver que todavía son víctimas de la
soberbia, del deseo de dominar a los otros. Acerquémonos más a la Eucaristía y aprenderemos a aceptar con alegría y gratitud las indicaciones que nos hagan, para bien de nuestra alma. Descubramos en la corrección fraterna la labor de la Providencia divina, que se sirve de esas sugerencias para conformarnos más con el mismo Jesucristo.

El alma y el cuerpo de la Virgen María han sido el primer Sagrario, el lugar más apropiado para que, durante nueve meses, reposara el Verbo encarnado. Dirijámonos a la Madre de Jesús y Madre nuestra, pidiéndole que nos enseñe a cuidar al Señor en la Eucaristía y, como consecuencia, a ser hondamente apostólicos. Así sea.


At the Easter vigil, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 11, 2009)

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

My dear sisters and daughters,

1. Haec est dies quam fecit Dominus, exsultemus et laetemur in ea! This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice. This is the acclamation of the Easter season that today resounds joyfully on our lips. We say it after these days in which we have contemplated the Passion and Death of our Lord. We want to proclaim it to the four corners of the earth: Jesus has risen! Having truly died, he has achieved the great marvel of the Resurrection, the foundation of our faith. His new life is not like the former, subject to
death, but a glorious Life, incorruptible and immortal, the model of the resurrection that we hope for at the end of time.

With reason we have sung, filled with thanksgiving: lumen Christi! Deo Gratias! May we desire to not separate ourselves from this clarity that brings us peace and makes us live in Christ. We want to seek it out in the Sacraments, which grant us an anticipation in the Life of the Son of God. We re-encounter it, should we happen to lose it, in the sacrament of Penance. And we want to transmit this gift to the people we deal with, so that they too might experience the joy of living the Life of Christ, of being brought back into his friendship that never lets us down.

On this great day God’s generosity becomes even more evident. God the Father did not hesitate to give the life of his Beloved Son, of infinite value, for the life of each one of us. Our existence, although it is of great value — because it has been bought with the Blood of Christ — for a great part of humanity is of little or no importance. They do not appreciate the divine price of this gift. Let us give thanks to our Redeemer for the heavenly wisdom that, as Christians, he has given us, and let us act accordingly.

2. Arrêtons-nous à considérer comment le Seigneur a voulu nous communiquer le prodige de sa Résurrection. Pour prendre la nature humaine et naître ici-bas, Dieu a compté sur la collaboration généreuse, pleine de foi, d’une femme jeune, éminente, mais une créature comme nous: la Vierge de Nazareth. Maintenant, pour communiquer la bonne nouvelle de sa Résurrection glorieuse, Jésus Christ se sert d’autres femmes, saintes, mais qui sont des créatures avec leurs faiblesses, comme nous. Il a voulu compter sur leur témoignage pour que le monde connaisse que “la Vie a été plus forte que la mort.”[1]

Que conclure du fait que le Christ apparaisse d’abord à sa Mère très sainte — selon la tradition de l’Église — puis à quelques autres femmes, au lieu de se montrer tout de suite aux Apôtres? Il s’est montré à ceux qui, quand ils se décident, ont une plus grande capacité d’aimer. Il convient que nous tous, et spécialement vous qui serez conscientes du rôle de la femme dans le monde et dans l'Église, vous osiez demander sincèrement et sans égoïsme: Seigneur, fais que je sache t’aimer comme tu le veux; que je ne
te renies pas l'amour que tu me demandes; que je désire généreusement ce que tu attends de moi.

Le Seigneur peut certainement passer auprès de nous pour nous rencontrer; mais il est évident qu'il le fait plutôt lorsque nous Le cherchons. Je vous répète ce que Benoît XVI disait il y a quelques semaines aux jeunes d'Angola: “N'ayez donc pas peur de prendre des décisions définitives. La générosité ne vous manque pas—je le sais! Cependant, face au risque de s'engager pour toute la vie, (...) vous éprouvez de la crainte (...). Osez prendre des décisions définitives parce que ce sont les seules qui ne détruisent pas la liberté, mais qui lui donnent la juste orientation, en permettant d'avancer et de faire quelque chose de grand dans la vie.”[2]

Qu'y a-t-il de plus grand et de plus beau que de donner totalement sa vie—le présent et l'avenir— à Jésus Christ, chacune suivant le chemin concret qu'Il vous indique?


Con grande buon senso, si pongono solo una domanda, logica: chi ci rimuoverà la pietra dell'ingresso del sepolcro? (Mc 16,3). Ma, dato che sono spinte da un amore senza limiti, vanno avanti, sfidando tutte le difficoltà. Non potevano né volevano stare senza il loro Gesù. In questo amore riscontriamo una fede forte, che le spinge a cercare il Signore, a stare molto vicine a Lui.

Così dovrebbe essere il nostro amore: acceso, generoso, totale. Un amore che dobbiamo comunicare agli altri. Perché, quando si possiede un bene, è logico rendere gli altri, senza esclusione, partecipi di questo tesoro. Consideriamo, inoltre, che se l'amore è sincero, si fa in modo di stare vicini alla persona amata, anche fisicamente. Così dobbiamo comportarci con
Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo. Forse in qualche situazione può essere difficile, ma dovrebbe essere per noi normale andare ogni giorno a salutare Gesù nel Tabernacolo, a stare un po' di tempo con Lui. Ti ripeto una considerazione che, come frutto di un'intensa vita interiore, San Josemaría ha lasciato scritta: “Gesù è rimasto nell'Ostia Santa per noi! Per restare al nostro fianco, per sostenerci, per guidarci.— E l'amore lo si ripaga unicamente con l'amore.— Come non ricorrere al Tabernacolo, ogni giorno, sia pure per pochi minuti, per portargli il nostro saluto e il nostro amore di figli e di fratelli?”[3]

4. Nos dirigimos ahora a Jesús resucitado y le decimos: Señor, haz que queramos vivir en ti, por la gracia. Que seas Tú la luz que guíe nuestras sendas, la fuerza que nos impulse a salir al encuentro de las demás personas, para ofrecerles la oportunidad de transformar su existencia rutinaria, quizá mortecina, en una vida nueva. Del mismo modo que Cristo ha colmado de alegría y de fortaleza a los Apóstoles y a las santas mujeres, dándoles el encargo de ir por todo el mundo a proclamar su resurrección, así ahora quiere que seamos nosotros, tú y yo, los que vivamos de Él y lo llevemos a todas partes.

Quien ha recibido la gracia de la fe, quien cree firmemente que Nuestro Señor ha vencido el pecado y la muerte y nos ha traído una Vida nueva —la mejor y única vida—, no puede permanecer indiferente ante las necesidades espirituales de los demás. Estamos obligados, por el amor que Dios tiene a todas las almas, a ser mujeres y hombres de constante afán apostólico. Ojalá ninguna de las personas que nos conocen o nos tratan, pueda elevar al Cielo la queja de que nadie le ha hablado de la alegría cristiana de estar con Cristo, de vivir en esa amistad que siempre lleva consigo la felicidad.

Pidamos a María, Madre de Dios y Madre nuestra, Regina apostolorum, que nos enseñe a hablar de Jesús con toda nuestra vida. Acudamos a la intercesión de San Josemaría, ante la urna que custodia sus sagrados restos mortales, para decirle: Padre, alcánzanos la gracia de que —como a ti— nos consuma en todo momento el afán de almas. Así sea.


At the diaconal ordination of two faithful of the Prelature, Church of St. Josemaría, Rome (February 21, 2009)

At the diaconal ordination of
Two faithful of the Prelature,
Parish of St. Josemaría

My dear brothers and sisters.
My dear sons about to be ordained deacons.

1. The words of the responsorial psalm are still fresh in our minds: How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! (Ps 84:1). We know that God’s presence is not tied to a particular place; we are in the times that Jesus predicted to the Samaritan woman: But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him (Jn 4:23). At the same time, we cannot forget that the Most Holy Humanity of Jesus is the true temple in which the fullness of the divinity dwells (cf. Jn 2:21; Col 2:9). After our Lord’s Ascension to heaven, we can find God in the Holy Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, and above all in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, which really and truly contains the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ. In addition, through sanctifying grace, we ourselves are made into temples of God, a dwelling place for the Most Holy Trinity.

With these considerations I want to reaffirm that we can make our own the words of the psalm, since we can always remain in God’s presence and serve him. I would like to recall in this regard some words of St. Josemaría that he addressed to all Christians: “In the most varied activities of our day, in all situations, we must act as God’s servants, realizing that he is with us, that we are his children. We must be aware of the divine roots set deep in our life and act accordingly.”[1]
In the second reading of this Eucharist, the apostle Paul offers us a summary of the virtues we should put into practice to act as true disciples of our Lord. From his Roman prison he exhorted the Ephesians, and he exhorts all of us, to behave in a way that is worthy of the vocation we have received: with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:2-3). We should meditate frequently on these words; they are a practical guide for our daily Christian conduct and our habitual examination of conscience. Thus our Lord will enter more deeply into our hearts. As the founder of Opus Dei wrote: “If we let Christ reign in our soul, we will not become authoritarian. Rather we will serve everyone.”[2]

2. Sacred ministers are especially called to tasks of service in the Church. Through the sacrament of Orders, in its diverse grades, they are made sharers in Christ’s mission, to serve mankind in imitation of the Divine Master. For Jesus, as we heard in the Gospel, came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28).

We are participating in the ceremony of diaconal ordination for two faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei. For many years, in striving to respond to the divine call to sanctity in ordinary life, they have served with joy the people God placed at their side: relatives, friends, colleagues… So apostolate is nothing new to them; from today on, however, they will exercise it in a new way: as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1).

To you, my sons, the Church is conferring the task of helping the bishop and his priests in their specific ministry: in the preaching of God’s word, in the celebration of the Eucharist and the administration of the other sacraments, in the service of charity.

I would like to consider briefly one aspect of the diaconal ministry: liturgical service. Put all your effort into treating our Lord well in the Eucharist. During the upcoming months of preparation for priestly ordination, together with the preaching of the word of God, this will be your principal task. You will have the opportunity to distribute Communion, to expose the Blessed Sacrament for the adoration of the faithful and impart Eucharistic Benediction. Perhaps you will have the
duty of bringing Holy Viaticum to someone gravely ill. In each of these circumstances, think of the goodness of Jesus, who places himself in your hands with total confidence. Meditate frequently on the teachings of St. Josemaría, who was a priest deeply in love with the Eucharist.

There comes to mind the emotion with which, shortly after receiving diaconal ordination, he touched the Sacred Host for the first time with trembling hands. This tremor was an exterior sign of love and respect for our Lord, which he wanted to express in each of his gestures. “Lord, never let me grow accustomed to having you in my hands!” was the prayer that sprang forth from his heart at that moment. Let us too ask today, for all deacons, for all priests, for all the faithful, that we may never become insensitive to the holy, divine realities that our Lord has entrusted to us, in a special way, in the Eucharist.

3. In these days of winter, snow has fallen heavily in many parts of the northern hemisphere, covering highways and mountain paths. Something similar can happen in a Christian's spiritual life. This is how St. Josemaría expressed it: “There are times of spring and summer, but there are also winters, days without sun and nights bereft of moonlight. We can’t afford to let our friendship with Jesus depend on our moods, on our ups and downs. To do so would imply selfishness and laziness, and is certainly incompatible with love.”[3]

What should we do when circumstances like these become present in our lives? The founder of Opus Dei frequently spoke about those tall poles, usually painted red, that one sees in the mountains along the side of roads and paths to mark the way when everything is covered with snow. He applied this to the interior life: “Therefore, in times of wind and snow, a few solid practices of piety, which are not sentimental but firmly rooted and adjusted to one’s special circumstances, will serve as the red posts always marking out the way for us, until the time comes when our Lord decides to make the sun shine again. Then the snows melt and our hearts beat fast once more, burning with a fire that never really went out. It was merely hidden in the embers, beneath the ashes produced by a time of trial, or by our own poor efforts or lack of sacrifice.”[4]
The time of Lent, now fast approaching, invites us to strengthen our Christian commitment. In his recent message for Lent, our Holy Father Benedict XVI reminded us of the need for assiduous prayer, generous mortification, constant deeds of charity, as necessary requisites for receiving the abundant grace of Easter. This year he considers in a special way fasting, which frees so many spiritual energies of the soul, frequently imprisoned because of an at times exaggerated care for one’s body.

First of all, the Supreme Pontiff puts us on guard against a minimalistic view of fasting. “In our own day,” he explains, “fasting seems to have lost something of its spiritual meaning, and has taken on, in a culture characterized by the search for material well-being, a therapeutic value for the care of one’s body. Fasting certainly brings benefits to physical well-being, but for believers, it is, in the first place, a ‘therapy’ to heal all that prevents them from conformity to the will of God.”[5]

Then, recalling Christ’s fast in the desert before beginning his public life, the Pope summed up the principal characteristics of this Lenten practice: “mortifying our selfishness and opening our heart to love for God and neighbor;” “conferring unity to the whole person, body and soul, helping one to avoid sin and grow in intimacy with the Lord;” “opening our eyes to the situation in which so many of our brothers and sisters live.” Therefore, he concluded: “Voluntary fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who bends low and goes to the help of his suffering brother.”[6]

Before ending, I remind you of the duty that we all have to pray for the Pope and those who assist him in governing the Church. Let us help him with our prayer and mortification that we will strive to make more intense during Lent. Let us also pray for the bishops, for Cardinal Vallini, the Vicar of His Holiness, for the priests and deacons of the whole world; for priestly and religious vocations; and for the sanctity of the entire Christian people. Let us place these intentions in the hands of our Lady, Mother of the Church, who well knows the needs of her children.

Amen.


At the ordination of 30 deacons of the Prelature, St. Eugene’s Basilica (May 23, 2009)

At the ordination of
30 deacons of the Prelature,
St. Eugene’s Basilica

Dear brothers and sisters. Dearest deacons.

1. You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

As recounted in the Acts of the Apostles, with these words Jesus Christ bids farewell to his disciples before ascending into heaven. He tells them that within a few days they will receive the Holy Spirit and he asks them to remain in the Holy City, waiting for the fulfillment of this promise. And indeed, ten days later the Paraclete descended upon them in the form of tongues of fire, filling them abundantly with his gifts.

Today these words of our Lord are directed in a special way to the deacons of the Prelature of Opus Dei who are going to be consecrated as priests. Starting today, conformed to Christ the Head of the Church, they will be able to carry out the priestly ministry: preaching the Word of God with authority, administering the sacraments, above all the sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist, and guiding the Christian people along the paths of eternal life.

In Baptism and later in receiving Confirmation, it is true that all of us
have been configured to Christ in order to continue his salvific mission, like instruments in his hands. All of us are called to transmit the good news that he has brought to the earth.

The Holy Spirit has been sent to us so that we may be able to fulfill this mission. Let us prepare to receive him fruitfully everyday and especially next Sunday, the Solemnity of Pentecost. Let us also decide to live the remaining days of the month of May by staying even closer to the Virgin Mary. Who can teach us to pray better than Mary, who accompanied the Apostles during the days before Pentecost? Like the Apostles, we too have to regroup close to our Mother, to pray with her and to pray as she prays. Let us be sure to finish this Marian month in the best way possible, by taking special care in praying and contemplating the Holy Rosary and in praying the Regina Coeli.

2. I will now address myself more directly to you, the deacons, who are about to be transformed into priests. I urge you with these words of St. Paul, which I want you to make your own with a sense of responsibility, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might (Eph 1:17-20).

The Apostle invites you to consider three points in a special way. In the first place, the hope to which the Lord calls you. This hope is nothing other than the possession of eternal life—and there can be no greater gift than this. By means of priestly ordination our Lord calls you to be holy in a new way, specific to the priestly state, namely through exercise of the ministry of the Word and of the sacraments, while taking particular care of your personal interior life. This is the extraordinary grandeur of your calling.

We have all been invited, as Jesus Christ himself insists, to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. St. Josemaría wrote: “There is no second class sanctity: there is either a continuous struggle to be in the grace of God and conformed to Christ our model or we desert these divine battles. Our
Lord invites everyone to sanctify himself in his own state. In Opus Dei this passion for sanctity—in spite of our individual errors and miseries—is not changed by the fact that one is a priest or a layperson.”[1]

On the other hand, it is undeniable that priests are particularly obliged to be holy. With the words of our Father, I remind you that “the priestly vocation brings with it the need for sanctity. This sanctity is not just any sanctity, a common sanctity, nor is it even an excellent sanctity. It is a matter of heroic sanctity.”[2]

Let us pray, therefore, for the new priests. Let us pray a lot for the Holy Father Benedict XVI, who counts on the prayers of the faithful. Let us also pray for his Cardinal Vicar and for the Bishops, priests, deacons and seminarians throughout the world. Let us pray that we may never lack well-prepared ministers of God, completely dedicated to the service of souls.

3. The Holy Father, Benedict XVI, with the convocation of the Year for Priests on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé of Ars, has wanted to make the Christian people aware of the need for many holy priests. As you know, the Year for Priests will begin on June 19 and will continue until June 19, 2010. We are all asked to offer prayers and mortifications for the sanctity of priests during these months.

In an address given during a pastoral visit, Benedict XVI highlighted the most important points in the life of a priest: “your faithfulness in the exercise of the ministry and the life of prayer, your search for holiness, your total self-giving to God at the service of your brothers and sisters, as you expend your lives and energy in order to promote justice, fraternity, solidarity and sharing.”[3]

The Holy Father went on to say that a priesthood lived in this way, one day after another, “calls forth admiration among the faithful, and is a source of blessings for the community; it is the best way to foster vocations, the most authentic invitation to other young people to respond positively to the Lord’s call. It is true collaboration in building up the Kingdom of God.”[4]

Before finishing I would like to thank the parents and siblings of the new priests, including those who were unable to attend this ceremony. You have all collaborated with God in sowing the priestly vocation of your sons
and brothers. Be assured that they will keep you very present each day in the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass. But for your part do not cease to pray for them, for their fidelity and for the efficacy of their ministry.

Let us return to the moment of our Lord’s Ascension Lord and listen anew to his words. Go into all the world—he tells us—and preach the gospel to the whole creation... And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it (Mk 16:15, 20).

We also want to act in the same way under the protection of our Lady. Amen.


[4] Ibid.

At the Mass in suffrage for Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, Gymnasium of the University of Navarra, Spain (March 23, 2009)

At the Mass for Bishop Álvaro del Portillo,
University of Navarra
Sports Complex
My dear brothers and sisters,
my dear sons and daughters:

I am very grateful to our Lord for having allowed me to celebrate this Eucharistic Sacrifice on the 15th anniversary of the holy death of my
beloved predecessor Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. Perfectly engraved on my memory is the last earthly dialogue of Don Álvaro with the Blessed Trinity, fulfilling the verse of a Psalm he had so often recited and savored: *Ego autem in te speravi, Domine; dixi: Deus meus es tu, in manibus tuis sortes meae*. “I trust in thee, O Lord, I say, ‘Thou art my God.’ My times are in thy hand.” With his characteristic peace and serenity, he surrendered his soul to our Lord, putting his whole life in God’s hands, filled with joy because the moment had come to receive the eternal embrace promised to those who follow Him.

Don Álvaro greatly loved this land of Navarra; he loved the people of this land and, as is only logical, he loved the University of Navarra in a special way. We know that, through the communion of saints, good friendships, noble loves, are not undone when someone departs for heaven. The affection and concern, both supernatural and human, that Don Álvaro had for this land and for this university has not ceased. From heaven he is urging us to live our Christian lives with greater effort, and he is commending us forcefully to God, who received while he was alive his humble but powerful prayer, grounded on his great trust in God. It is only natural that we go to his intercession now so that he will help us to be good daughters and sons of God.

We are in the fourth week of Lent, named after the first word from Sunday’s liturgy: *laetare*. This week is not a pause in this time of conversion. It is a reminder that we should be joyful amid this change, this encounter with God that comes from striving to offer him more fully our conduct as Christians. The Church wants us to prepare for the Easter Triduum, for the central mysteries of our Lord’s passion, death and resurrection, which open up for us the path, as we heard in the second reading, for coming to realize that we are truly God’s children and for behaving as such. God has willed Christ’s passion, death and resurrection for each one of us, so that we would come to know the extent of his love.

The liturgy for this Tuesday of the Fourth week of Lent and the liturgical readings help us to focus on the three fundamental points that the Church recommends to us in order to prepare to meet Christ on the Cross.
Specifically the Church asks us to put special care into prayer, fasting and alms-giving. In other words, to strive to be detached from ourselves in order to let Christ reign in our life, in our soul. The Pope has also asked us for this. I want to take advantage of this occasion to make this request: that from this Eucharist a forceful clamor may rise up to heaven for the Pope’s intentions, who is giving himself so willingly for all humanity. Let us accompany him as good sons and daughters. We will not be good children of the Church if we are not personally and intimately united to the successor of Peter, to the Vicar of Christ. Let us truly be able to offer him, as St. Josemaría wished, the joy of our affection and the support of our prayer and expiation.

We have read marvelous texts in this Eucharist, and also in the Eucharist celebrated this morning. This morning we heard how the prophet Isaiah could not restrain his joy in announcing to us that the Saviour is going to prepare a new heaven and a new earth for us. How close our Lord wants to be to us! The Gospel narrates how Christ followed the centurion to cure his sick servant. How closely Christ follows us, my children, how closely he follows us! He is constantly protecting us with his shadow, helping us with his grace, urging us forward with his joy.

In the Mass that we are now celebrating we have heard the words of Job, who assures us that each of us can write our own life in the book of heaven. With characters of gold; more than of gold, with divine characters, because God gives us his grace so that our life can have all the supernatural importance it should have. God is always interested in you and in me. He never abandons us or leaves us unprotected.

The three points that the Church reminds us of for Lent refer to the life of the soul, the principal life, which rules the life of the body, the physical life. Prayer, fasting and alms-giving are not merely external acts that we need. Prayer, expiation and fasting have a much deeper meaning: the decision to rise above our own ego, as I said earlier, in order to identify ourselves more fully with Christ, the only model for every man and woman.

We can reject Christ, we can ignore Christ, but that would mean rejecting ourselves, ignoring ourselves, forgetting the reality that we are
God’s children, which St. Paul’s words recalled to us. So let us follow Christ, let us be close to Christ, let us turn constantly to Christ.

The Church counsels us not to preach a eulogy for the person remembered in the Mass for the dead until that person has been beatified. Today we ask the Blessed Trinity to increase the glory of our beloved Don Álvaro, so that he may contemplate the Trinity from very close up. Therefore we want to consider how he strove to practice prayer, fasting and alms-giving in his own life.

Some words from Scripture that refer specifically to alms-giving deeply moved St. Josemaría: *hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus*. “God loves a cheerful giver.” God does not need my contribution, but at the same thing he wants to need our correspondence, our self-giving as Christians, so that we may enter into his friendship and share it with many other people, with everyone we can.

Don Álvaro was always a “*hilarem datorem,*” a giver filled with joy and generosity. He was never calculating. He gave all that he had to God, and through God, to everyone he met. St. Josemaría often used to say that “those who spend their years on earth with the joy of knowing they are God’s children will also be happy in heaven.” I think that the smile and the peace that this good servant of God Don Álvaro transmitted, and that can also be seen in his photographs, shows that the joy of his divine filiation ruled all his actions. It was not just a feature of his character; he cultivated that joy, which became so strong because he sought God each day, and because he transmitted to others the reality that we are very close to God.

How did Don Álvaro strive to stay close to God?

Restricting ourselves to the three points which the Church invites us to put special care into during Lent, I repeat that he was very diligent in prayer. He nourished his prayer with a deep Eucharistic life and also by going frequently to the sacrament of Confession. He put great love into his encounters with the Blessed Sacrament, and went to the sacrament of pardon punctually. He endeavored with his life to open up these fundamental paths, the Eucharist and Confession, to souls, insisting that we had to get closer to our Lord. Thanks to his conduct and his words, many men and women returned to or grew in the joy of living their faith.
He was very diligent in fasting, in expiation, which is an essential source of authentic love. Don Alvaro knew how to love and to make himself loved in order to draw souls to God, going out to meet them from a very young age. Right from his youth God flooded him with a zeal for souls that he could barely contain. This way of acting stemmed from his recognition that true friendship entails generous and self-sacrificing service, always striving to do more. So many people recall Don Alvaro’s love for them. We ourselves have to learn from him, to remember each day that charity, supernatural and human affection, flows from the cross and passes through the cross, in both its great and small manifestations. Don Alvaro was a good friend, an exemplary friend, who never left his neighbor unassisted.

And finally he was generous in alms-giving, following in the footsteps of Christ. Christ himself assisted those around him quickly and cheerfully, with self-detachment. And he taught us that concern for the poor, for the needy, also in the spiritual sense, was not satisfied by some coins, whether few or many, of base metal or gold. We have to give our time, our human and intellectual abilities, our availability. And always without seeking recompense, without expecting to be paid back.

Don Alvaro welcomed this message of Christ, an evangelical message, which makes each man or woman more like God. This servant of God incorporated into his life the attitude of always trying to learn, in order to give himself more fully to God and others, without allowing the slightest fissure to open up between God and himself, or between others and himself. I think that his life can be summed up by an aspiration he himself used, as a fruit of his prayer: “Thank you Lord, forgive me, help me more.” By praying it, he was giving thanks to God, and thanks to other men and women; he was asking God for forgiveness, and for forgiveness from other men and women; and he was asking for more help from God, and for more help from other men and women.

To attain these goals he was always very Marian. In addressing Mary he recalled a prayer that his mother taught him when he was quite young. I won’t repeat it word for word since I don’t remember it exactly, but it said more or less: “My sweet mother, don’t leave me / don’t take your eyes off
me; come with me everywhere, and since we love each other so much, have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless us.”

With Don Álvaro’s help let us put ourselves in the hands of Mary, and tell her to accompany us always so that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit may bless us. May God bless you.

Torna ai contenuti

At the Feast of St. Josemaría, St. Eugene's Basilica, (June 26, 2009)

On the Feast of
St. Josemaría,
St. Eugene's Basilica

My dear brothers and sisters:

1. Today we are offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the liturgical memorial of St. Josemaría Escrivá, whom our Lord has raised up in the Church... to proclaim the universal call to holiness and apostolate.

We are doing so united to the thousands of people all over the world who are giving thanks to God for his gift to all mankind of this exemplary and holy priest. Countless men and women from all walks of life have learned to love and follow Jesus thanks to St. Josemaría’s teachings and example.

Thirty-four years have gone by since his death. During this time, the influence of his example has never ceased growing, and recourse to his intercession has spread continually. We see how timely is the message that God entrusted to him, to make it bear fruit through his generous and total response to God’s calls right from his adolescence. St. Josemaría sometimes spoke about those premonitions of God’s love and of a specific mission for his life. The response of that boy, who was then only 15 or 16 years old, was an act of generous acceptance of God’s will, which led him to become a priest so as to make himself available for a call of which he did not yet know the details. From that moment on, and throughout his whole life, he
was a person in love with God, who also passionately loved the world and his fellow men and women. Today’s feast reminds us that a similar dialogue of love should take place between the Creator and every human being. Let us go to the intercession of this holy priest so that he can help us to respond with generosity and joy.

When he urged the faithful to pray for the sanctity of priests, he used to say that “a priest doesn’t go to heaven alone: he always goes surrounded by a cohort of souls”—the souls who have come closer to God through his administering of the sacraments, through his preaching, through his prayer, through his priestly zeal, through his pastoral charity. Therefore we need to pray every day that the Holy Spirit will raise up many holy priests in the Church, and that all of us will be ever more aware of our priestly soul. This is everyone’s duty: men and women, young and old, the sick and the healthy…. We all need to keep this intention constantly present: through our prayer, offering up daily annoyances and small mortifications, carrying out our professional work very well and in God’s presence. Thus we will respond to Jesus’ call: *The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest* (*Mt* 9:37-38).

This petition, which is always necessary, has special timeliness in regard to vocations for the priesthood. A week ago our Holy Father Benedict XVI inaugurated a Year for Priests, for the purpose of obtaining from God the gift of many holy priests throughout the world. How are we praying for this intention? Are we convinced that no one can take our place in this very personal duty?

2. A Christian’s life is always a priestly existence, as we learn from the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the patrons of Rome and of the universal Church. The Prince of the Apostles, in his first letter, expressed it as follows: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (*1 Pet* 2:9). And St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, 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).
All Christians share, through Baptism, in Christ’s priesthood. We have all received the common priesthood, essentially different from the ministerial priesthood proper to sacred ministers, but no less necessary. Both the priesthood of the faithful and that of priests, each in its own way, are indispensable for the fulfillment of the mission that Christ entrusted to the Church for the salvation of the world. This teaching of the magisterium, which was proclaimed in an especially solemn way at the Second Vatican Council, was preached and spread by St. Josemaría since October 2, 1928.

Priests and laity thus constitute in the Church a single family of sons and daughters of God. As St. Josemaría used to say, “a priest is no more a man or a Christian than any ordinary lay person.”[1] Configured to Christ by virtue of Baptism, we are all members of the Mystical Body with the same dignity, and equally responsible for the Church’s mission, which each one carries out in a specific way. In addition, “in those who have been ordained, the ministerial priesthood is added to the common priesthood of all of the faithful. Therefore, although it would be a serious error to argue that a priest is more a member of the faithful than an unordained Christian is, it can, on the other hand, be said that he is more a priest: like all Christians he belongs to the priestly people redeemed by Christ, and in addition to this he is marked with a character of the priestly ministry.”[2] Without the ministerial priesthood, without priests, the Church would not exist.

St. John Marie Vianney, the Holy Curé of Ars, said that “the priesthood is the love of Jesus’ Heart.” And Benedict XVI commented: “This touching expression makes us reflect, first of all, with heartfelt gratitude on the immense gift which priests represent, not only for the Church, but also for humanity itself. I think of all those priests who quietly present Christ’s words and actions each day to the faithful and to the whole world, striving to be one with the Lord in their thoughts and their will, their sentiments and their style of life.”[3]

3. Let us return to the texts proper to today’s Mass. The collect, after stressing that St. Josemaría has been called by God to proclaim the universal call to holiness and the apostolate, adds: grant that in faithfully
carrying out our daily work in the spirit of Christ, we may be formed in the likeness of your Son and... serve the work of redemption with an ardent love.[4]

Daily work and the ordinary circumstances of life are the specific field where lay people strive to attain holiness and carry out apostolate. In this context, a feature of the spirituality taught by St. Josemaría is very important: to do everything with a “priestly soul and a lay mentality.” This means that the lay faithful are asked to carry out their profession, and all of their family and social obligations, with the mentality proper to people who are called to work in the midst of the world and, at the same time, with the priestly spirit that is a characteristic of the Christian vocation.

Therefore I invite you to meditate on some other words of St. Josemaría that refer particularly to the lay faithful: “You all have a priestly soul, rooted in the sacramental characters of baptism and confirmation. A priestly soul that you exercise not only when you participate in liturgical worship—and above all in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the root and center of our interior life—but in all the activities of your life.”[5]

In The Forge, he also offers specific advice: “Live and work for God, with a spirit of love and service, with a priestly soul, even though you may not be a priest. Then all your actions will take on a genuine supernatural meaning which will keep your whole life united to the source of all graces.”[6]

On the morning of June 26, 1975, about an hour after having spoken about these topics in a gathering, our Lord called him to Himself. We too have an obligation to pass on this beautiful message to so many of our friends and colleagues: that we are all called to holiness, which is union with Jesus Christ and the fullness of love, and that this can be attained in any situation, age and place.

We will repeat this shortly in words from the liturgy: Accept, Father, these gifts we offer in memory of St. Josemaría, and through this sacramental renewal of the sacrifice of the Cross graciously sanctify all our works.[7]

Let us entrust all these aspirations to the intercession of our Lady, closely united to the Roman Pontiff and his intentions. Our Mother, obtain for us from your Son an abundant harvest of holy priests, forged to the measure of Christ’s heart, and of lay people who are sincere Christians.
Amen


[2] Ibid.


Addresses

Presentation at the Fourth Conference on “Catholics and Public Life,” Bilbao, Spain (March 21, 2009)

*Address at the Fourth Conference on Catholics and Public Life*

“Conversion to Christ” —

“Conversion into Christ”

*Conversion to Christ through the Sanctification of Work*

Conversion can be understood as either “conversion to” or “conversion into” a new belief or substance, with a different meaning depending on the preposition used.
To “convert to” means to change one’s interior dispositions, especially one’s religious convictions. In broader terms, it implies directing one’s attention towards a new and different person or goal. This meaning is very close to what Scripture calls *metanoia*: the invitation to begin a new life in response to the announcement of the coming of the kingdom of God, with which John the Baptist and later Jesus himself began their preaching.\[1\] Christian tradition, as early as the apostolic era, spoke of conversion in the same sense, emphasizing that God’s kingdom, power and love have become present in Christ. To convert, therefore, means to turn one’s eyes towards Jesus, to have faith in him, to direct one’s actions in accord with his word and person.

The other expression mentioned above, “conversion into,” also refers to a change of life, but connotes, in an explicit way, not only a new outlook and a new way of acting, but also a true transformation of the subject, which becomes something different from what it was before. In a Christian context, it indicates that conversion entails much more than just the acceptance of a message related to Jesus or a simple adjustment in one’s way of behaving based on the ideals Christ proclaimed. Christian conversion has a person as its goal: the real and living person of Jesus Christ. To convert means to identify oneself with Jesus, to become one single reality with him.

The distinction between “conversion to” and “conversion into” makes clear that every Christian is called to identify him or herself more and more deeply with the Master, to strive to make fully one’s own the sentiments of Christ,\[2\] and thus be able to say with St. Paul: it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.\[3\]

The Pauline statement just cited and, like it, so many other expressions of the Apostle to the Gentiles, can be interpreted in an experiential and mystical sense. At least this is what numerous spiritual authors have held, beginning with that great figure of the early Church, Origen,\[4\] although contemporary exegetes are often more cautious.\[5\] It is not my intention to go into this debate. Rather I want to stress that Christian spiritual experience does not close us up within ourselves, but rather, by identifying us with Christ, it impels us—with Christ and in Christ—to open ourselves to all humanity.
Moreover (and it is worth emphasizing this in a conference such as the one we are taking part in), our faith in Christ strongly spurs us to feel responsible for all that surrounds us, for the society to which we belong, for the progress of the world and the future of history. Indeed, it is there that the union with Christ to which every Christian is called should make itself felt. As St. Josemaría Escrivá wrote: “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. And then.... *pax Christi in regno Christi*—the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ.”[6]

The process of identification with Christ finds its origin and foundation in Christ himself. It is he who attracts us towards himself, through the sending of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Church. He draws us through the preaching of the Gospel, which transmits to us the teachings of Jesus, and through the sacraments, where our Lord makes himself present with his sanctifying power. Nevertheless, this divine initiative does not exclude our human cooperation; it demands our free response at the same time as it makes this possible for us. “Christ’s life is our life,” said St. Josemaría Escrivá, “just as he promised his Apostles at the Last Supper: If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (*Jn* 14:23). That is why a Christian should live as Christ lived, making the affections of Christ his own, so that he can exclaim with St Paul: It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me (*Gal* 2:20).”[7]

The life of each person, with all the incidents that make it up, thus becomes part of the process of identification with our Lord. Each Christian, with one’s qualities and limitations, with one’s way of being and acting, is called to that identification, and thus to give witness to Christ, to make him present in our surroundings. “Those who will save this world of ours,” St. Josemaría insisted, “are not those who try to drug the life of the spirit, reducing everything to financial questions or material well-being, but those who have faith in God and in the eternal destiny of man, and who receive Christ’s truth as a guiding light for their action and behavior.”[8] At every moment, as the Roman Pontiff reminds us, we have “to be touched by the reconciliation which God has given us in Christ, by God’s ‘foolish’ love for us.”[9] Then, as St. Paul writes, nothing and no one will be able to
separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.[10] And the Holy Father concludes: “We live in this certainty. It is this certainty that gives us the strength to live concretely the faith that works in love.”[11]

**Identification with Christ and Sanctification of Work**

I have been invited to speak about conversion to Christ, about identification with him, not in general, but precisely in reference to the sanctification of work. This was—and is—a central point of the message of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, who insistently reminded us of the need to place Christ at the summit of all human activities.[12]

I will consider work in the context of professional work, the committed dedication to a stable task thanks to which one supports oneself, maintains one’s family and contributes to social progress. Therefore, this also includes the indispensable work of the housewife and homemaker, and those who help to care for families. Thus understood, work implies for the person a decision to undertake seriously and responsibly the duties that life brings with it. It also leads to a deeper awareness of the questions being debated in the society to which each one belongs and to seek solutions for its problems and future needs.

Work is thus a decisive element in the process of each person’s human maturing; and a determining factor in one’s development as a follower of Christ and in bringing one’s Christian ideals to bear on society. This requires working in such a way that one’s faith fully informs one’s professional work.

St. Josemaría expressed this untiringly with this phrase: Christians not only have to seek sanctity in their work and sanctify others through their work, but also, and inseparably, they have to sanctify the work itself. [13] In other words, they are called, certainly, to sanctify themselves in carrying out their daily tasks, and to take advantage of these tasks to open up to those around them horizons of Christian life; but also, and I repeat, inseparably, they have to sanctify those tasks themselves, giving them life from within, in accord with the proper nature of each one, with the light and impetus that comes from the Gospel.[14]

**Work as an act of dominion, freedom and love**
Identifying oneself with Christ in work requires first grasping deeply what any professional occupation entails and, with that as a foundation, confronting it and living it in accord with and in Christ, in a unity of life. Let us look at this in more detail and consider some of the fundamental features of the activity of work in order to suggest, although briefly, how they can be the occasion for an ever deeper conversion to Christ, with the help of grace.

The creation narrative in the Bible presents work as a capacity granted to man by God to have dominion over and possess the earth. Especially in recent centuries, the development of the experimental sciences and technology have made it possible for this dominion to grow, a growth that, as Pope John Paul II pointed out, is in full consistency with the Biblical command. Even more, it can be considered as a fruit or effect of that command. It is also true that some modern currents of thought have gone to the extreme of viewing technology as the only force on which mankind’s prosperity and future depend. The human person’s ethical and religious dimensions are thus relegated to a second tier, and can even disappear entirely.

By contemplating the mystery of God’s love for us revealed in Christ, we will overcome every false divinization of science and the world, and break free from the closed circle in which part of modern culture has become imprisoned. Benedict XVI expressed this with singular beauty in a homily given on the past feast of the Epiphany. In Christ, God incarnate, we have come to know that “the divine and universal law of creation is divine love.” “This,” he continued, “should not be understood in a poetic but in a real sense... This means that the stars, planets and the whole universe are not governed by a blind force, they do not obey the dynamics of matter alone. Therefore, it is not the cosmic elements that should be divinized. Indeed, on the contrary, within everything and at the same time above everything there is a personal will, the Spirit of God, who in Christ has revealed himself as Love.” Thus men are not slaves of the elemental spirits of the universe (Col 2:8), but are free, “capable of relating to the creative freedom of God.”

Christ—who brought us light, truth and peace—frees us from fear and selfishness. Aware of our condition as children of God in Christ, we can
confront the material world with dignity and rise above ourselves, opening our eyes and heart to the reality of infinite Love. We can come to share in that love, bringing to bear in our work the freedom that Christ has won for us.\[19\]

My Father is working still, and I am working, said Jesus, replying to those who criticized him for having performed a miracle on the Sabbath.\[20\] We can apply these words as well to the work Jesus carried out during his hidden years in Nazareth. Our Lord spent his days in obedience to the Father, corresponding with his free human will to the Father’s love—an infinite love that, in Him, was manifested to all humanity.

We should never tire of telling those around us that work, every honorable human task, offers the possibility of uniting ourselves with Christ, sharing in the fullness of freedom and love with which Jesus carried out his own work. United to Christ, Christians should carry out their daily tasks with the awareness of God’s nearness, which will spur them to make each of their actions—even the smallest and most commonplace—an act of worship of God and service to mankind. We will recognize in other men and women brothers and sisters whom we are called to love with a love that is an echo of—even more, a participation in—Christ’s own love.

**Work as an act of service**

This leads us to a further consideration: work as a service to others, and therefore as a means for identifying ourselves with the Master. Human work is marked by its social character, especially in the division of labor. This is a reality that has been present throughout all of history, from simple primitive societies to today’s complex world that is the result of the growth of technology, rapid communications and commercial interchange—in a word: the result of globalization.

The division of labor entails two basic attitudes: solidarity and trust. People hope to meet their personal needs, not only through their own strength alone, but relying on the contribution of others, while doing all they can to meet others’ needs. The effective growth of the common good, thanks to the division of labor, is not obtained automatically—nothing is automatic in regard to free human activity—but presupposes the exercise of virtue.
Work as an act of dominion requires the exercise of virtues such as industriousness, order, patience, striving to overcome tiredness and difficulties that arise, etc. The division of labor requires, in addition, honesty, loyalty, faithfulness to one’s word, truth and sincerity in transactions; in a word, justice and all of the spiritual dispositions that foster it. If virtue gives place to selfishness, the proper division of work ceases to produce its fruits; injustice arises and even human exploitation and structures of sin, that is, structures or ways of acting which, having arisen from injustice, contribute to perpetuating it.[21]

In the face of this all too real situation, Christians raise their eyes to the example of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.[22] And he gave us the commandment of love—a love that was to be a sharing in his own love—as the distinctive sign of his disciples.[23] Work in its concrete reality places Christians before a multitude of situations that invite them to look towards Christ, to convert to Christ, to let themselves be imbued by his word and his example. Specifically, his example of service to and care for those around him. Thus a Christian can identify himself or herself with Christ and make Him present among other men and women.

In carrying out the duties of each day, in our relationships with our companions or colleagues at work, the attitude of service always requires “getting out of oneself” and paying attention to others. Sometimes this will require acts of true heroism. As St. Josemaría wrote: “A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ’s heart.” And he added: “While Christians enjoy the fullest freedom in finding and applying various solutions to these problems, they should be united in having one and the same desire to serve mankind. Otherwise their Christianity will not be the word and life of Jesus; it will be a fraud, a deception of God and man.”[24]

This is not the place to produce a list of the crucial questions of our times, nor to consider specific ways of confronting them. Nevertheless, I want to cite some words from a homily Benedict XVI gave at the beginning of 2009. After raising some of these great problems—situations of extreme poverty, the economic crisis, the inequalities that globalization has sometimes given rise to, war and terrorism, he invited his listeners to truly commit themselves to try to help solve them, pointing to the example
of Christ’s life. “The poverty of Christ’s Birth in Bethlehem,” he said, “as well as being the subject of adoration for Christians, is also a school of life for every man. It teaches us that to fight both material and spiritual poverty, the path to take is the path of solidarity that impelled Jesus to share our human condition.”[25]

Our daily work and activities offer many opportunities to practice forgetfulness of self, a zeal for service, the love shown in deeds that constantly marked, hour by hour, Jesus’ passage through our world. And, as a result, to identify ourselves with him. Let us never forget that Christ comes to meet us also through those around us: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”[26]

**Work and the Cross**

Often, when speaking about the reality of work, we tend to emphasize its unpleasant aspects, which are the consequence of sin. However, an over insistence on this factor can deform reality and overshadow crucial aspects of human experience: the value of work as a factor in human development, the experience of creativity and the joy that so often accompanies it, etc. In Sacred Scripture, work is spoken of before sin, as part of the gift to exercise dominion over the earth that God granted to mankind from the beginning of time. In the words of St. Josemaría, “in itself work is not a penalty or a curse or a punishment: those who speak of it that way have not understood Sacred Scripture properly.”[27]

It is true that the original order has been damaged and twisted by sin; but it is also clear that, in the words with which God announced the merited punishment, he did not take away mankind’s dominion over the earth. Rather, since the original harmony had been destroyed, the earth would produce “thorns and thistles,” and bread, a symbol of the goods necessary for life, would be obtained only through “the sweat of your face.”[28]

Certainly the reality of work often brings with it not only effort but also weariness, including the exhaustion of one’s physical or psychic strength. The succession of days—apparently the same—can produce a feeling of routine and open the door to laziness. Our projects, although thought out carefully and put into practice with diligence, are not exempt from the risk
of failure. We often face tasks that involve major difficulties. And one may encounter injustice, misunderstanding, calumny, or accidents, leading to anxiety and anger, anguish and discouragement.

In this situation, a person may need to muster all his human strength to confront these challenges with renewed determination. But a Christian can do much more: he can look to Christ, God made man, the Eternal Son of God the Father, who fully assumed our human condition except for sin, taking upon himself all the pain and suffering of human history, in order to transform it, through his love and self-giving, into salvation and life.

On hearing these words, our thoughts go directly towards eternal happiness, towards the new heavens and the new earth to which God is directing the whole of history, and where there will be neither death nor suffering nor sorrow nor tears. For we have been created for the fullness of life, and heaven places before our eyes the object of the absolute hope announced in the Gospel. At the same time, we should not forget—as Benedict XVI emphasizes in his Encyclical Spe Salvi—that this hope, precisely because it is absolute, gives meaning to all the moments of human history. “His Kingdom [the Kingdom of God which is manifested in Christ] is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us.” The love manifested in Christ conquers selfishness and sin and is the guarantee that the fullness of life that every human being longs for, even though only unconsciously, actually does exist. And therefore, the Roman Pontiff continues, this love “gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect.” It also gives us the “capacity to accept tribulation, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love.”

On the Cross, Christ gave himself up to death, showing that he loved us right to the end. That supreme self-giving sheds light on the entire life of our Lord, including the times in his preaching when he experienced hunger, sleep or weariness; and those other times which the Gospels do not mention but which were certainly present when, as a craftsman in Nazareth, he experienced the effort and fatigue of daily work.
In all the varied situations of human work, both those marked by creativity and joy, and those where failure or exhaustion enter in, a Christian can and should be united to Christ and, in Christ, to God the Father, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. This may involve an act of thanksgiving for the gifts we have received, or asking for light and help, or for forgiveness when we see our own faults. At other times, it will mean offering, in union with our Lord’s Cross, our own pain and suffering. We can always find in our work the four aims of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice: adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and reparation. Thus our conversion to Christ will result in a real identification with him. And in every circumstance, even amid our own limitations and deficiencies, we Christians will be a witness to the love and hope that God has made present in history.

I would like to end my presentation with some words of St. Josemaría that can serve as a fitting conclusion. “What illuminates our conscience is faith in Christ, who has died and risen and is present in every moment of life. Faith moves us to play our full part in the changing situations and in the problems of human history. In this history, which began with the creation of the world and will reach its fulfillment at the end of time, the Christian is no expatriate. He is a citizen of the city of men, and his soul longs for God. While still on earth he has glimpses of God’s love and comes to recognize it as the goal to which all men on earth are called.”

St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 103.

St. Josemaría Escrivá, Address on the occasion of the awarding of honorary doctorates at the University of Navarra, May 9, 1974.

Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 26, 2008.

*Rom* 8:39.

Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, November 26, 2008.

Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 105 and 134; *Conversations*, no. 59.

Cf. *Conversations*, nos. 10, 24, 70; *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 46; *Friends of God*, no. 120, etc.


*Jn* 5:17.


Cf. *Mk* 10:45.


[25] Benedict XVI, Homily on the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, January 1, 2009. The homily includes part of the Message for the World Day of Peace which was celebrated that same day.


[27] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 47.


[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., no. 37.


[38] St. Josemaría Escrivá, Christ Is Passing By, no. 99.

Torna ai contenuti

Message on the Abruzzo earthquake, Italy (April 6, 2009)

Message regarding the earthquake

As soon as I received news this morning of the powerful earthquake that shook the Abruzzo region, I raised my heart to God, through the intercession of St. Josemaría, in petition for the souls of the dead and for the speedy recovery of the injured.
I am convinced that St. Josemaría, who passed through that beloved region so many times and who prayed so much for the men and women of Abruzzo, will intercede for them in a special way during these moments and gain from God the grace that the material and moral damage be as small as possible.

With all my heart I unite myself to the people affected by the tragedy and, together with my prayer, I send them my blessing, asking our Lord to grant them the strength and consolation that they need in these moments.

+ Bishop Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei

Articles and Interviews

Interview granted to Quotidiano di Sicilia, Italy (June 27, 2009)

Interview granted to Quotidiano di Sicilia.
By Alessio Petrocelli

What is the mission of Opus Dei?

Its “mission,” to use your expression, is that of striving to follow Jesus Christ, to imitate him, and to make him known to everyone, everywhere. This is what the holiness to which all the baptized are called consists in. Perhaps the most specific feature of Opus Dei is that this personal encounter with Jesus takes place—with the grace of the sacraments—through professional work, family life, friendship, and all the other circumstances of daily life. So it is a goal which, with God’s help, is attainable by everyone.

The Prelature of Opus Dei is inserted in the secular channel of the
pastoral praxis of the Catholic Church, of which it is only a small part. This is a channel of faith and charity, opened up two thousand years ago by Jesus when he said: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

What exactly do your activities of spiritual formation involve?

St. Josemaría liked to define Opus Dei as “a great work of catechesis.” With the collaboration of many other people, the faithful of the Prelature organize initiatives to help people grasp more deeply the content of the Christian faith and morality. These are initiatives open to people of any age, profession and educational background: classes in theology, meetings to study and reflect on the Pope’s encyclicals and other documents of the magisterium, courses in professional ethics, gatherings in which parents can confront the current challenges in raising their children. These are just a few examples among many, because the possibilities are so varied.

There are also formational activities that are more properly spiritual and ascetical: retreats and days of recollection; talks on topics of Christian life attended by small groups that offer practical suggestions for living the virtues in daily life; and, finally, for those who want, the possibility is provided to speak with a priest for spiritual direction and for confession, etc. The aim of these means of formation is to come to know and love God, in order to transmit this love to others—beginning with those around us—since the challenge confronting a Christian is to put his or her faith into practice in the midst of one’s family, with colleagues at work, in all environments. The methods and pedagogy are in continuity with the traditional means of the Church: prayer, meditation on the Gospels, etc., and always with supernatural and human optimism, because we are sons and daughters of God.

I would like to add that, in carrying out its commitment to give formation, the Prelature never interferes in the professional and family life, or in the political or social views of its faithful. It limits itself to offering a Christian formation adapted to each person, so that they, one by one, can bring Christ’s love and joy to their family and their social or professional milieu.

What norms regulate the organization of the Prelature?
Besides what is established in the Code of Canon Law, we have the statutes approved by the Holy See. At the same time, Opus Dei (and this is an expression used by the founder) is a “disorganized organization,” where each person acts with freedom, both in the activities of formation and in their personal apostolate. Underlying everything are criteria of collegiality, respect for autonomy, care for and trust in each person. Thus in each country the activities organized are the ones best suited to the local situation, with specific objectives chosen in an autonomous way. The organization of these initiatives is also autonomous at the local level in confronting the difficulties involved in supporting them financially. This is always a challenge, since these activities have an educational and social goal, never a profit-making one. Therefore the generous help of many people is of decisive importance.

What is the total number of members of Opus Dei? How many of them are lay and how many are priests? Has the number of members been growing?

The figures can be found in the Annuario Pontificio. In 2009 there were 87,000 lay faithful and 2,000 priests. Thanks be to God, each year the number of faithful of Opus Dei grows with respect to the previous year, although, as is natural, there are also many whom our Lord calls to heaven.

In any case, it is good to stress that God is not interested in global numbers but in each person in his or her singularity, one by one. What is important is not numbers but the spiritual improvement of each person, that is, the growth of his or her personal identification with Christ.

Last month I visited Japan and Taiwan for pastoral reasons. There too I saw with joy that many people are coming close to the Church, seeking the meaning of their existence. The reality is that only Jesus is capable of quenching the desire for happiness that is present in each one’s heart.

It also gives me joy to see that the apostolic work of the faithful of Opus Dei, like that of the whole Church, is developing not only in the “old” Catholic or at least Christian countries, but also in many “young” nations insofar as evangelization is concerned, such as, for example, in Africa: the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Nigeria, The Congo, Kenya... And precisely during these weeks stable apostolic activities of Opus Dei are
beginning in Korea, Indonesia and Romania. Contemplating this panorama awakens in me sincere gratitude towards God.

What is the most important of the founder of Opus Dei’s teachings, as seen in the life of the Prelature?

That the reality of each one’s daily life, the path of ordinary life, which at times might seem monotonous, contains divine light and value. St. Josemaría insisted that Christ wants to “become incarnate” in our occupations and animate them from within, even our most humble actions. This is the message that our Lord entrusted to the founder of Opus Dei in 1928. It was an ideal that had frequently been forgotten throughout history but that was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which placed it in the center of its pastoral aims. I think it is a forceful call to bring an authentic sense of mission to the lives of so many Christians.

Every day the web page of the Prelature of Opus Dei (www.opusdei.org), which one can access in 28 languages, receives hundreds of petitions from people who are seeking God. I think this is one more confirmation, among many others, that Christ’s call continues being timely, and that it is making itself felt more pressingly in today’s world.

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Interview granted to Przewodnik Katolicki, Poznan, Poland (June 7, 2009)

An interview granted to Przewodnik Katolicki. By Aurelia Pawlak

Last year Opus Dei was 80 years old. Founded by a diocesan priest, the Work today is spread throughout the world and is opening up many new centers. Does this mean that in this world of ours so filled with turmoil, people still feel the need to draw close to God?

Certainly, people need to be close to God, and when this contact is missing they live with a “nostalgia” for God, who is above all our Father. We shouldn’t forget that God is the one who has sought this relationship,
this closeness. When he created mankind, he is the one who takes the initiative, who seeks out his creatures, each man and woman.

It seems clear to me that it is this divine concern for us that has also led to the reality of Opus Dei in the Church, a reality of Christian life that is an expression of God’s mercy towards the world and that is seen in the expansion of the Prelature throughout the world.

I am happy to tell you that during these days some faithful of the Prelature have begun the apostolic work in Indonesia. Those who have begun there know very well that the seed they are planting in that country will grow, as in other countries, above all under the impulse of grace.

*Every anniversary is an opportunity to take stock. What ideas come to mind when you look back at the years that have gone by?*

The experience of these 80 years stirs up in the Prelature’s faithful first of all a reaction of humility, since each one well knows that God is the one who is doing everything. He makes use of us, his children, and grants success to apostolic endeavors that by ourselves we would never be able to carry out.

At the same time, there naturally arises deep gratitude to God for the marvels he has accomplished by means of Opus Dei: the spread of the call to holiness in all sectors—in work, in the family, in social relationships—fostering love for Jesus Christ and his Church.

I also personally give thanks to God for the social and evangelizing projects promoted by members of Opus Dei, along with many other people, in response to the new needs of our times, such as the Monkole hospital, which treats some 40,000 people a year in the outlying areas of Kinshasa. I could also include here the Campus Biomedico University in Rome, whose definitive site was opened just a year ago. This is a health-care center that gives special attention to the dignity of the human person and the elderly.

*The world is being ravaged by a wave of secularization, many people are choosing a model of life which has little to do with the teachings of Christ. For example, one sees this clearly in regard to pre-marital chastity, which is viewed as something out of date. Poland is a country that is somewhat special in Europe,*
where Christian traditions seem more strongly rooted. What do we Poles have to
do so as to resist a consumerist life style and defend moral values?

To have an effective influence on society, we Catholics, both the Polish
people and everyone else, have to strive to be trustworthy witnesses who
show forth in our conduct the model of Christ, perfect God and perfect
man. That is to say, we have to live the Christian and human virtues as
well as possible.

I have had the good fortune of traveling several times to Poland, and
have noted with joy how deeply rooted piety is in most of its people: they
genuflect with piety, a sign of faith in the Eucharist; they celebrate the
Liturgy with dignity, and take advantage of the sacrament of confession.
These ways of acting reflect the faith more than many words. The Holy
Father Benedict XVI never ceases to stress the importance of these
apparently small gestures.

Of course, spiritual direction, doctrinal formation and reading
Scripture are also very important for maintaining and defending one’s own
convictions, because without doctrine the faith falls apart. For example, one
of the first things that those who go to Centers of Opus Dei are advised to
do is to read the New Testament each day. Even if a matter of only a few
minutes, that daily contact with Sacred Scripture keeps a Christian alive
because it places one in dialogue with Christ. The last Synod of Bishops,
on the Word of God, strongly stressed the need for Christians to rediscover
each day the treasures contained in the Scriptures.

And as I just said, the human virtues are also important. I know that
the men and women of Poznan, for example, are very hard workers. I am
sorry to admit that I’ve never been there, although I hope to have an
opportunity to visit it some day. In any case, the habit of hard work found
in those living there is one of the human qualities that forges interior
consistency in people, especially if it is done with supernatural outlook and
an eagerness to serve society.

Through their interior life and virtues, Christians can bring
constructive values to bear on public life: each one autonomously from his
or her own position. This is what St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of
Opus Dei, called a lay spirit, which is marked by love for freedom and
personal responsibility to undertake initiatives related to key topics of human dignity: the family, the defense of life, education, the eradication of poverty, etc., always in accord with faith and morality, with the Church’s magisterium.

Many people think that sanctity is an ideal accessible only to a few chosen persons. Being aware of our weaknesses and limitation, how can we attain holiness in our ordinary life?

St. Josemaría Escrivá said that “sanctity is more attainable than learning, but it is easier to be a scholar than a saint.” He wanted to express the idea that the struggle for sanctity is difficult, but it is within everyone’s reach. It is never an ideal just for a few chosen souls.

We struggle to attain sanctity when we make an effort to pray and to frequent the sacraments. Because we love God, as we do other people, if we strive to stay close to him, every day, whether we feel like it or not.

We also struggle for sanctity when we try to ensure that charity towards our neighbor is present in our life, not only as a generic sentiment but as a specific reality in the midst of the thousand small details that come up in our work, in the home, in social relationships, when we smile, when we serve others without asking for anything in exchange, when we show understanding towards the defects of those around us, when we forgive, when we practice fraternal correction.

Opus Dei demands a lot of its members. Not long ago I heard that there is no place in Opus Dei for sinners. What do you think about this?

Thank God, that isn’t so, because in that case Opus Dei would be empty, since we are all sinners and we know that, as he himself said, Christ came to save sinners.

As I mentioned earlier, in Opus Dei we are very aware of our own personal deficiencies. And we also realize that we have to commit ourselves seriously to be better each day, also learning from the virtues of so many good people in the world.

It is no secret when I say that John Paul II had a great esteem for Opus Dei. In canonizing St. Josemaría Escrivá he called him the saint of the ordinary. Did the Polish Pope have direct acquaintance with the Opus Dei Prelature?
Before he became Pope, he knew about Opus Dei through Cardinal Deskur, on his trips to Rome. Cardinal Deskur admired St. Josemaría and was a great friend of the one who was to be his successor as head of Opus Dei, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. He spoke to the Cardinal of Krakow about Opus Dei and its founder when he came to Rome.

I can never forget that it was John Paul II who established Opus Dei as a personal prelature, although the work that was to culminate in that decision, by which Opus Dei obtained the juridical personality desired by its founder, went back much further.

John Paul II showed great confidence in Don Alvaro. For example, the fact that faithful of Opus Dei are working in Kazakhstan today is due to that Roman Pontiff who, on one occasion, told a bishop from there that he should ask Don Alvaro, at his request, that he do whatever was necessary to have some priests and lay people of Opus Dei go to that country. This occurred in March of 1994. A few days later, on March 23, Don Alvaro died. That evening, the Pope went to pray at his wake in the Prelatic Church of Opus Dei.

_What are your intentions for the Year of St. Paul?_

St. Paul is, among other things, an example of a deeply Christocentric life and also an important figure for ecumenism. As far as the Prelature of Opus Dei is concerned, I hope that stable apostolic work will begin soon—this year if possible—in several countries where the majority of people are non-Catholic, including Romania and Bulgaria.

I think that in the area of ecumenism, the Polish Church can do a lot: not only the priests, but also the laity who reside in other nations, by trying to adapt to the mentality of their new country, while spreading a Christian way of life, striving to carry out apostolate. The Pauline Year is a good opportunity for all Christians, in the exercise of their professional work as doctors, journalists, tradesmen, etc., to become aware of their apostolic mission in the world to make known to others Christ’s love, and thus help them to live with joy and optimism.

_This past August, the Holy Father Benedict XVI resided in a retreat center of Opus Dei in Australia. How do you interpret this gesture of the Holy Father?_
Naturally I was very happy about the fact that, while in Australia, the Pope rested for a few days in a center of Opus Dei. But at the same time, it would have seemed equally natural to me if, instead of going to that retreat house, he had gone to some place offered by other Catholics.

Because of its location and facilities, the organizing committee for World Youth Day chose that place.

I was very happy that some of the faithful of the Prelature in Australia were able to express in a material way the affection that all Catholics have for the successor of Peter.

Interview granted to BBC World, London (June 18, 2009)

*Interview granted to*

“BBC World.” By

Christopher Landau

What is the place of Opus Dei in the Church? What is a personal Prelature?

Opus Dei is a part of the Catholic Church. Its purpose is to remind all Christians that they are called to holiness whatever their state in life.

It helps Catholics to live their faith in their ordinary life: work, family life, social and cultural activities,

etc.

A Personal Prelature is a type of organization in the Catholic Church which is ideally suited to Opus Dei. With the Prelate and his priests, it can have members who are men or women, married or single, intellectuals or manual workers.

*What is the influence of Opus Dei in the Church and in the world today?*

Opus Dei serves the Church and reminds all Christians that they
should strive to be holy in everything they do.

It inspires individuals to change the world for the better, serving people with their lives, and striving to make Christ present in all environments.

When St Josemaría was a young priest, he once wrote in a notebook after Mass, that it would be the men and women of God who would place Christ at the summit of all human activities. It would be individuals with their lives of integrity who would make the difference, rather than organizations.

I ask your prayers so that Opus Dei, as a part of the Church, can continue to inspire people to be leaven in society.

*What is the program of Opus Dei for the future?*

The program of Opus Dei is the program of the Catholic Church.

For instance, one of the main priorities in the Church is to encourage young people to follow Jesus Christ with confidence in his Church and with love for his Sacraments. I remember clearly my trip to Sydney for the World Youth Day last July. When the Pope proposes to young people authentic models of Christian life they always respond, even if it is difficult. And this happens in Australia, in the United Kingdom, in Africa, in the Middle East...

Another priority of the Church is to help families. To raise a family with joy nowadays is a great challenge: the house, schools for the children, looking after the old and sick members of the family, the pressure of work... But in my view the family needs above all spiritual support, which is also human support. I mean they should not feel alone when facing problems. They should feel the warmth and affection of other families, and of other people. That’s why the members of Opus Dei as normal citizens promote so many activities of Christian formation directed to parents.

And another important priority is the culture: we need to have an open dialogue between faith and science. In all professions new challenges are arising, which require answers that are compatible with both faith and reason, as Pope Benedict XVI has spoken about so often.
To which countries is Opus Dei hoping to go in the near future?

I am very happy to say that in these days some members of Opus Dei have gone to live in Indonesia. After that I hope that some men and women of Opus Dei will be able to start stable work in Korea and in Romania in June.

In these countries they will be very happy to work with the local Catholic communities and also to establish very friendly relations with people of other religions.

How important is growth to Opus Dei?

The most important growth is the spiritual growth of each person. This is the main goal of every Christian: to become more and more like Christ. This is the real growth, the only growth that matters.

But of course, Christ also said that we should pray for “workers for the harvest,” so we pray that many people respond to God’s call.

So, growth is important for Opus Dei in the same way as for the Church as a whole. At the same time, God is not interested in numbers as such but in souls one by one.

Message regarding the Year of the Priesthood (June 19, 2009)

During the Year of the Priesthood declared by Pope Benedict XVI, let us beseech God our Lord for priestly vocations in the Church and for the sanctity of all priests.

While striving to grow in our understanding of the ministerial priesthood, which differs essentially from the common priesthood (cf. Vatican II, Dogmaric Const. Lumen Gentium, no. 10), let us ask God that all the faithful may have a vibrant “priestly soul,” and that we may know how to spread the joy of this gift to all the people we are in contact with.
Among the many writings of St. Josemaria on the priesthood, we would like to point out:

— His homily “A Priest Forever” in the book *In Love with the Church.*
— *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 79
— *Furrow*, no. 499.
— *The Forge*, no. 369.

For the ministerial priesthood:

— Vatican II, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*;
— John Paul II, Apost. Exhort. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992);
— Benedict XVI: Homilies and addresses for the "Year of the Priesthood";

Torna ai contenuti
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Publishing news

On May 25, the first edition of *Camino* published in Santo Domingo was presented in the Embajador Hotel in Santo Domingo, with a talk by the philosopher Tulio Espinosa. Among other dignitaries present at the ceremony were Cardinal Lopez Rodriguez and the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Jozef Wesolowski. St. Josemaría stayed in the same hotel in 1970, when he had to spend a day in Santo Domingo because of a problem on a trip from Mexico to Spain.

In Nairobi, Scepter publishers brought out a new Kenyan edition of *The Way of the Cross*.

In Hong Kong, Spring Publications released the second edition of *Furrow* in traditional Chinese, with a print run of 1,500 copies.

The Corporation for Studies and Publications, in Quito, has published the first Ecuadorian edition of *The Forge*. It was presented on April 20 at the Simon Bolivar Convention Center in Guayaquil. Archbishop Antonio Arregui offered some theological considerations on the contents of the book.

In April, the Parisian publisher Le Laurier brought out the third French edition of *Christ Is Passing By*. Ares Publishers in Milan has also published the 9th Italian edition of the same book.

In June, the weekly newspaper Druzina of the Archdiocese of Ljubljana published the homily “Zvestoba Cerkvi” [Loyalty to the Church] in Slovenian. In Brazil, the publisher Quadrante brought out the homily *Passionately Loving the World*, with a theological commentary by Pedro Rodriguez.

*Un cammino attraverso il mondo*, an anthology of St. Josemaría’s writings published at the end of 2008 by Lindau (Turin, Italy), was presented during the first half of 2009 in the cities of Alcamo (Trapani), Agrigento, Verona, Turin, Rome and Milan. The editor of the book is Fr. John Wauck, professor of literature and communications at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.
The Spanish collection Noticias Cristianas “Testigos para el siglo XXI” [Christian news: witnesses for the 21st century] directed by Joaquín Monrós, has brought out the booklet St. Josemaría Escrivá: Loving God in the Ordinary, written by Pedro Estaún Villoslada, with pictures by María de los Ángeles Jiménez de Anta.

In Rome, a presentation ceremony was held for the book Josemaría Escrivá, Santo, published by Ares. It collects the most important documents of the Founder of Opus Dei’s Cause of Canonization. Its author is the former Postulator of the Cause, Msgr. Flavio Capucci.

Francisco Varo, professor of Sacred Scripture at the University of Navarra, edited, in connection with the Pauline Year, the book Alegres con esperanza. Textos de San Pablo meditados por San Josemaría [A Joyful Hope: texts of St. Paul meditated on by St. Josemaría]. It was published by Rialp, in Madrid. Varo comments on 37 passages from St. Paul’s letters that St. Josemaría compiled in 1933, and that he used frequently for his personal prayer and preaching.

Torna ai contenuti

Commemorative ceremonies in honor of St. Josemaría

Strasbourg: Exposition “Discover a Saint”

In the church of Saint Pierre-le-jeune catholique, in Strasbourg, the Friends of Josemaría Escrivá association organized an exposition with posters about the life and message of the Founder of Opus Dei. During the three days of the exposition, from January 9 to 11, visitors could also view various documentary films about St. Josemaría and Opus Dei. For the preparation of the event, the local Catholic clergy were contacted, as well as Lutheran ministers (near the Catholic Church that hosted the exposition there is a Lutheran Church with a similar name). A warm welcome was extended by both groups.
**Southernmost city in the world**

Ushuaia (Argentina), the world’s closest city to the South Pole, has dedicated a street to St. Josemaría. The capital of the large province of Tierra de Fuego, Ushuaia is on the shores of the Beagle Channel and has some 45,000 inhabitants. There are now almost a dozen Argentinean communities that include St. Josemaría among their street names.

In Burgos, Spain, the Exposition Hall of the Consulado del Mar held an exposition from January 9 to 18 entitled Saint Josemaría Escrivá: his time in Burgos.

The exposition, a follow-up to the ceremonies that in 2008 commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Founder of Opus Dei’s stay in this Castillian city, was organized by the Arlanza Association and coordinated by Maria Jésus Coma. It included explanatory panels, items from that era, and other documents and objects of interest.

In the opening ceremony, which was attended by Archbishop Francisco Gil Hellin of Burgos, the historian Constantino Anchel, from the St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer Center of Documents and Studies (Pamplona), summarized the most important events of St. Josemaría’s life during the “Burgos epoch.” It was in Burgos, for example, that he finished writing The Way. The exhibition included some copies of the first edition of this book, the most famous of St. Josemaría’s works, among them one dedicated by the author in 1941 to the monks of the Burgos monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos, where three years earlier he had made a retreat. It was also during this epoch that St. Josemaría began work on his doctoral thesis on the quasi-episcopal jurisdiction of the Abbess of the convent of Las Huelgas, which was later published as a book.

St. Josemaría lived in Burgos from January 8, 1938 until March 27, 1939, a period that encompassed the final fifteen months of the Spanish civil war (1936 to 1939). He had spent the first fifteen months of the war as a clandestine priest in Madrid, and escaped from the zone of religious persecution by hiking across the Pyrenees at the end of 1937.
Sardinia: a plaza dedicated to St. Josemaría

Accepting the petition of some of its citizens, the municipal council of Nuoro, capital of the province covering the eastern part of the island of Sardinia, decided in November 2008 to dedicate a plaza to St. Josemaría Escrivá.

The dedication ceremony took place on March 28, with the presence of Bishop Pietro Meloni of Nuoro and Ivo Carboni, the deputy mayor. The ceremony was quite colorful owing to the participation of a number of boys and girls dressed in the traditional costumes of the city.

Other Italian cities that have included St. Josemaría in their local geographical names are Arese (in the province of Milan) and Santa Maria Capua Vetere (Caserta), which dedicated a street to him. In Minturna (Latina), the Parco San Josemaría Escrivá, an attractive park on the side of a promontory overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea, was officially inaugurated, with a public ceremony enlivened by the municipal band. The religious ceremony was officiated by Cardinal Julian Herranz.

A parish in Madrid

The parish of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was erected by the Archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco, on June 5, 2007. The first lines of the decree erecting the new parish reads as follows: “To provide better pastoral attention to the district of Valdemarín, separated by National Highway 6 from the rest of the parish of the Assumption of Our Lady of Aravaca, and to accommodate the rapid urban growth of the area, it was deemed advisable to create a new and separate parish.” And the decree continues: “Having seen the favorable reports of the local pastor and archpriest, as well as that of the illustrious Episcopal Vicar, and having heard the views of the Priests’ Council (c. 515, & 2º), which in their meeting on March 29 and 30 voted in favor of this step, I hereby decree the creation of the parish of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, in Madrid.”
In October of that year, the Cardinal named as pastor and assistant pastor Frs. Juan Enrique Miralbell and Raimundo Romero, priests of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

The parish was inaugurated on February 17, 2008, with a concelebrated Eucharist presided over by the Episcopal Vicar of the area, Msgr. José Luis Huéscar Cañizal, in which the two priests of the parish took part as well as the Archpriest of Aravaca-Pozuelo and the former pastor of the parish of the Assumption.

On May 17, 2009, a temporary church of prefabricated construction was inaugurated. This put an end to the initial itinerant stage in which the parish had to make use of whatever facilities were available. The acts of worship, for example, were celebrated in the chapels of two homes for the elderly; catechism classes for children took place in a day-care center, etc. The religious communities within the parish boundaries also offered their assistance with great generosity during these first months.

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St. Josemaría in the Basilica of Luján

The Basilica of Luján, about 45 miles from Buenos Aires, is the most popular center of Marian devotion in Argentina. On June 12, 1974, St. Josemaría Escrivá went there to pray to our Lady.

On Friday, June 12, 2009, the 35th anniversary of that visit by the Founder of Opus Dei to Our Lady of Luján, a statue of St. Josemaría was placed on a side altar of the Basilica. The statue, sculpted in Carrara marble, is the work of Orio Dal Porto, an artist from Italy. It shows the saint with open arms and his palms facing upward; he is dressed in priestly vestments and has a slight smile.

Archbishop Austín Radrizzani, who presided over the ceremony, recalled the Founder of Opus Dei’s visit to Argentina: “At the moment of his departure, on June 26, 1974—exactly one year before he went to heaven—filled with gratitude to God and our Lady, he said good-bye to thousands of persons who listened to him with great emotion, saying: “I long to stay with you. And when I leave I will remain at the feet of Our
Lady of Luján; there I leave my heart.” Today, on blessing the statue of St. Josemaría that is now alongside our Mother, those words of love are somehow fulfilled: he came, he left, and he returned to stay. Thus we can count on his intercession, united to the omnipotent supplication of Our Lady of Luján, every time that we come to see her. And we can ask them to help us and our families, and all the pilgrims who come to the Shrine, to be happy here on earth by sanctifying our daily life and serving others—especially the most needy—and to reach heaven.”

The choir of the Colegio Buen Consejo, a school run by faithful and cooperators of the Prelature in a low income district of Buenos Aires, accompanied the ceremony with their singing.

**Torna ai contenuti**

**Historical Institute of St. Josemaría Escrivá: third volume of Studia et Documenta**

The biographies of St. Josemaría published up till now include many details about the years following the foundation of Opus Dei and preceding the Spanish Civil War, but some aspects of that period have hardly been dealt with. Number 3 (2009) of *Studia et Documenta*, the journal of the Historical Institute of St. Josemaría Escrivá, has a monographic section on St. Josemaría in Madrid in the thirties. Two specialists in the religious history of the interwar period, Jose Luis González Gullón and Jaume Aurell, provide a detailed study of the group of priests that St. Josemaría gathered together in those first years of Opus Dei’s existence, transmitting to them his apostolic ideal. The dozen priestly stories open up a very interesting perspective on the life of the clergy in Madrid during the Second Republic in Spain.

The section also includes a brief sketch of one of the first followers of St. Josemaría, Luis Gordon, a young entrepreneur in the beer industry who died prematurely in 1932. It is written by Pedro Pablo Ortuño, a specialist in economic history, and Luis Gordon Beguer, a nephew of the person discussed. Also worthy of mention is the article by Federico M. Requena
on Josemaría Escrivá’s connection with the “Work of the Merciful Love,” a devotion tied to the Sacred Heart that was very widespread in Spain at that time. In addition, Beatriz Comella discusses St. Josemaría’s pastoral activity in the Foundation of St. Elizabeth in Madrid, where he became chaplain in 1931, and rector in 1934.

In the section Studies and Notes, Jose Luis Illanes, Director of the Historical Institute, offers a complete overview of the writings of St. Josemaría, published as well as unpublished. Illanes, who has examined he documents of the Founder kept in the archives of the Prelature—including the notes from his oral preaching—presents a chronological panorama of the various texts of which St. Josemaría is the author, which form a rich patrimony for the whole Church. These will be published systematically over time, within the framework of the complete works of St. Josemaría on which the Institute has been working for years.

In the Documentation section, Santiago Casas, a professor of the history of the Church and an expert on contemporary Spanish Catholicism, comments on St. Josemaría’s written records of his meetings with Francisco Moran, Vicar General of the Madrid diocese, between 1934 and 1938.

In addition to critiques and reviews, the bibliography section contains the second part of the complete list of works published about St. Josemaría up until 2002—a total of 350 references, accompanied in some cases by brief explanatory notes—begun in the previous issue of the journal.

Eucharistic celebrations on the feast of St. Josemaría

The Church celebrates the feast of St. Josemaría Escrivá on June 26. On and about this date many Masses were celebrated in his honor throughout the world, also in countries where Opus Dei has just begun its apostolic work, such as Korea, Romania and Indonesia; and in others where it is not yet present in a stable way, such as Thailand, Tanzania, Botswana, and Vietnam.
In Dubai a Mass in honor of St. Josemaría was held for the first time, celebrated by Fr. Albert Pampillón in the church of St. Francis, with about seventy people attending.

In Nagasaki, Japan, the chaplain of the Nagasaki Seido school celebrated a Mass. Among the congregation were a number of persons who had recently been baptized. After the Mass a class was offered in the school library about St. Josemaría’s life.

In Jerusalem, the liturgical feast was celebrated on June 26 in the Latin Patriarchate Co-Cathedral. Christians of various denominations took part, coming principally from Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Tel Aviv. In his homily, the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in the Holy Land, Fr. Diego Daza, emphasized the value of daily life, which ordinary Christians are called to sanctify. And he recalled, in connection with Benedict XVI’s recent trip to Israel, the love for the Pope that St. Josemaría spread during his life on earth.
NEWS
Other news

Two books about Opus Dei

The publisher Rialp has published in Spanish the books *Memoria ingenua* (Candid Memories) by Alfons Balcells, and *Vosotros sois la luz del mundo* (You are the Light of the World) by the Swiss priest Martin Rhonheimer. The original version of the first of these appeared in Catalan in 2005.

In *Memoria ingenua*, a posthumous work, Alfons Balcells describes, among other things, the beginnings of the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Barcelona from 1939 on, a period that saw many difficulties. Balcells joined Opus Dei in 1943 as a young doctor. A prestigious pathologist, in the sixties he would become Rector of the University of Salamanca.

*Vosotros sois la luz del mundo*, a title taken from our Lord’s words (*Mt* 5:14), is directed to young people. Its author, a professor of ethics, is a well known and prolific writer on topics of morality. On this occasion he confronts, in an accessible and thorough way, the topic of the Christian vocation, and specifically the call to Opus Dei.

Fiftieth anniversary of Montse Grases

On the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the Servant of God Montserrat Grases (1941—1959), a commemorative ceremony was held in Barcelona in a hall attached to the Oratory of Santa Maria de Bonaigua. The speakers were her friends Rosa Pantaleoni and Jordi Suriol; her biographer, Jose Miguel Cejas; and Josep Palmerola, Mayor of Seva, the village where the family of Montse spent their summers.

Montse Grases died on March 26, 1959, Holy Thursday. Rosa Pantaleoni recalled that “up to the last minute she was very simple and calm, staying close to Our Lady of Montserrat.” She still considers her a great friend whom she is close to. Jordi Suriol also related some personal memories of Montse, and said of her, in summary, that she “had a good head, a loving heart, and a firm will.” For his part, José Miguel Cejas offered some thoughts about the meaning of Montse’s life. Despite its few years, “she did what was most important: she loved with her whole soul.”
Josep Palmerola recalled the day when the people in Seva were talking about the news that “the daughter of the Grases” had “a terrible disease.” Everyone in the village was impressed by the family’s calmness in confronting that difficult situation.

After the round table, the Vicar of Opus Dei in Barcelona, Fr. Antonio Pujals, celebrated a Mass in the Oratory of Santa Maria de Bonaigua for the soul of Montse.

Also in connection with the anniversary, an international competition about Montse was held, with three segments (comic, narrative, and audiovisual), in which young people from 9 to 18 took part. The jury was made up of Carlota Goyta and Asunción Esteban, authors of a popular children’s comic, the writer Carlos Pujol, and the publicist Xavier Roca. Young people from the United States, Poland, Mexico, Austria, and the Philippines, as well as other countries, took part in the competition.

**African students with the Pope**

Gathered in Rome during Holy Week to take part in the UNIV Congress, young people from eleven African countries presented a letter to the Pope in which they expressed their gratitude for his prayer and his words of encouragement during his trip to Cameroon and Angola. We reproduce the letter here:

Holy Father,

In the name of the young people of Africa, we thank you wholeheartedly for your recent trip to Angola and Cameroon, and especially for the words you addressed to us in the Dos Coqueiros Stadium in Luanda. Thank you for the understanding that you showed for the expectations, the joys, the fears, and the sufferings of our continent.

Thank you for the courage and the clarity with which you have become a spokesman for Africa, also when addressing the rich countries, gathered a few days ago in London. In the weeks following your trip, your words about the need for public morality have become a reference point for our countries.

At times when we Africans read the newspapers of the so-called “Northern world,” we feel misunderstood, undervalued and even used
selfishly by some. In contrast, in telling us that Africa is “the continent of hope,” Your Holiness has shown that you have trust in us and you have brought us a message of encouragement.

Thank you, Holy Father, also for the demanding words that you directed to us and for your invitation to us to strive personally to further education, to serve others, and to struggle against corruption. In these demands we also see the esteem and the respect that the Pope has for us. We do not forget that you told us that the path to transforming our continent begins with the renewal of our hearts.

Thank you for wanting to be with us, to listen to us, to show us the path and stir our consciences. In the name of all the students and young people of Africa, we want to tell the Pope that we will put all of our strength at the service of Africa, striving to transform it with patience and constancy, working for the future generations.

To maintain this commitment, we rely on the Holy Father’s prayer and trust.

The letter was signed by Serge and Cyrille Futcha (in the name of the participants from Cameroon), Marie-Louise Thiaw (in the name of the participants from Senegal), Supriano Dembe (in the name of the participants from Angola), Busișiew Fortunate Letsoto (in the name of the participants from South Africa), Mark Muhoro (in the name of the participants from Kenya), Sompto Chukwemeka (in the name of the participants from Nigeria), Janvıer Mahougnon Gbenou (in the name of the participants from Benin), Clementīne Kiodi (in the name of the participants from the Congo), Alex Mbonimpa (in the name of the participants from Uganda), Aimee Adjou (in the name of the participants from the Ivory Coast), and Brenda Garriga (in the name of the participants from Equatorial Guinea).

The University of Navarra: Fifty Years at the School of Communications

During the 1958-59 school year, the Institute of Journalism in what was then called the “Estudio General de Navarra” began operating. The School of Communications at the University of Navarra, the successor to the Institute of Journalism, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary this year.
Almost 8,000 people have passed through the school in this half-century, including the professors and students of the various programs that have been offered, both to undergraduates (currently in three areas: Journalism, Audiovisual Communication, and Advertising and Public Relations), and to graduate students (Postgraduate Program for Latin-Americans and the Masters in Communication Management and in Political and Corporate Communication).

The anniversary was commemorated on Saturday, May 16, in a gathering that included many alumni and distinguished professionals in the field of communications who have received their training in the School’s classrooms.

A new liturgical institute in Rome

On May 19 of 2009, the Liturgy Institute at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross was established, under the direction of Professor Antonio Miralles. The new institute is part of the School of Theology, which up to now comprised five departments: Dogmatic Theology, Moral Theology, Spiritual Theology, Biblical Theology and History of the Church.

Opus Dei begins stable apostolic work in Indonesia, Korea and Romania

From the 2nd to the 7th of June, fifteen numeraries of Opus Dei—nine laymen and six priests—came to Rome to receive from the Prelate some pastoral guidelines for their future work in Korea, Romania, and Indonesia, where they were about to go, or (in the case of Indonesia) where they had been living for a few months.

They then flew to their new countries, where they celebrated the feast of St. Josemaria on June 26th for the first time, and where they are now working professionally.

The new centers of the Prelature in Romania and in South Korea are located in Bucharest and Daejon respectively. They were erected with the venia of the local Ordinaries. In Indonesia, the first Center of Opus Dei is in Surabaya, in Eastern Java, which was also opened with the venia and support of the bishop.
In the three countries, activities of Christian formation for faithful of Opus Dei, Cooperators and friends have been carried on for some time. Now that work can be attended to with greater continuity.

First session of the processes on the life, virtues, and reputation for holiness of the married couple Tomás Alvira and Paquita Domínguez (February 19, 2009)

On February 19th, Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, Archbishop of Madrid, presided at the session opening the Cause of Canonization of the married couple, the Servants of God Paquita Domínguez Susín and Tomas Alvira Alvira, faithful of the Opus Dei Prelature.

In the presence of their eight living children (one child died at the age of five), the Cardinal emphasized “the need for the Gospel of the family to be proclaimed” and pointed to the Alviras as “an example of this witness in the twentieth century.”

At the same time, a diocesan tribunal was appointed which will assemble the evidence needed to “determine if they can be considered as an example and as intercessors for all Catholics,” the Postulator of the Cause, Fr. Jose Carlos Martin de la Hoz, stated.

Tomas Alvira and Paquita Domínguez joined Opus Dei in 1947 and 1952, respectively, and carried out their professional life in Aragon and Madrid. Dr. Alvira was a professor of Natural Science and a researcher for the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). His wife was a teacher.

Cardinal Rouco recalled that John Paul II, before the new millennium, stressed the importance of the holiness of Christian couples, and said that “the Christian witness of the family is very necessary.” Up to now two married couples have been beatified: Luis and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi in 2001 and the parents of St. Theresa of Lisieux, Louis Martin and Zélie
Guérin, in 2008. Although holiness certainly is always personal, these processes are being carried out simultaneously for both spouses.

Torna ai contenuti

**Conclusion of the investigative phase of the canonization process of the Servant of God José María Hernández Garnica (March 17, 2009)**

Auxiliary Bishop Cesar Franco Martínez of Madrid, concluded the diocesan phase of the process of canonization of the Servant of God José María Hernández Garnica (1913-1972), priest of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

The Bishop emphasized “the importance of holiness in the life of the Church, which hopes for holiness as the primary contribution of Christians.” He spoke of the Servant of God’s faithfulness in “dedicating his life to the sanctification of many people,” “propagating the charism with which the Holy Spirit enriched the Church through St. Josemaría.”

He also asked that his example “be an incentive for us, a spur to seek sanctity for every Catholic. May we have many more processes such as this one, which are a sign of the Church’s vitality.”

During the ceremony the boxes with the documentary evidence gathered by the tribunal since February of 2005 were closed and sealed. They will be sent to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints to obtain the decree of validity of the process.

Fr. José Maria Hernández Garnica was one of the first faithful of Opus Dei, which he joined in 1935. A mining engineer, he also earned doctorates in science and theology. He was one of the first three faithful of Opus Dei to be ordained a priest. This took place in 1944, together with the Servants of God Álvaro del Portillo and José Luis Múzquiz.

He sought sanctity in his professional work and later in his work as a priest. He carried out a broad and self-sacrificing apostolic and pastoral
work in Spain, England, Ireland, France, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Holland. Together with the supernatural means, especially prayer and the sacraments, he also employed all the human means within his reach. He learned several languages, adapted himself to different environments, and endured many hardships in countries where he began the apostolic work of Opus Dei.

Pontifical appointments

On November 18, 2008, Msgr. Juan Ignacio Arrieta Ochoa de Chincetru, Msgr. Antonio Miralles and Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz were appointed consultors of the Congregation for the Clergy.

On March 24, 2009, Rev. Joseph Bonnemain was appointed as a Chaplain of His Holiness.

On June 2, 2009, Msgr. Lluis Clavell was appointed as President of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas “ad quinquennium.”

On June 27, 2009, Rev. Fernando José Castro Aguayo was named Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Caracas, Venezuela.

Masses in suffrage for the soul of Don Álvaro

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the death of the first successor of St. Josemaría, the Servant of God Álvaro del Portillo, Solemn Masses were celebrated in many cities throughout the world. The following are some examples:

In Paris, Msgr. Antoine de Rochebrune, Regional Vicar of the Prelature in France, celebrated Mass at the parish of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont.
In Bogotá, Msgr. Libardo Ramirez Gomez, Judicial Vicar of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, celebrated in the Church of Christ the King.

In Vienna, Dr. Ludwig Juza, Regional Vicar of the Opus Dei Prelature, celebrated Mass in St. Peter Kirche.

In Puerto Rico, Archbishop Roberto Gonzalez Nieves, OFM, celebrated the Eucharist in the Church of San José de Caparra.

In Cebu, the Philippines, Msgr. Rommel Kintanar, celebrated Mass in the parish church of St. Joseph.

The Regional Vicar of Australia, Fr. Victor Martinez, celebrated Mass in the parish of St. Michael, Lane Cove (Sydney). Priests of the Prelature and of the Archdiocese of Sydney concelebrated with him.

Other celebrations took place in the Church of Our Lady in Amsterdam, the Church of Our Lady of Peace in Guatemala, the Church of St. John Bosco in Tegucigalpa, the Metropolitan Cathedral of San Salvador, the Church of the Miraculous Medal in San Isidro (Peru), the parish of San Ramon (Santiago, Chile), the Oratory of St. Josemaría in Lisbon, the Church of Santa Generosa in São Paulo, the parish of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Montevideo, and the parish of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Caracas, among many other cities throughout the world.

New Centers of the Prelature

Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, has established in Rome four dependent Centers, two of the General Council and two of the Central Advisory.

The regional vicars have established new Centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Cadiz, Spain; Bucharest, Romania (2 centers); Celaya (Guanajuato, Mexico); Ciudad de Quetzaltenango (Guatemala); Toledo, Spain.
First session of the process on the life, virtues, and reputation for sanctity of the Servant of God Encarnita Ortega Pardo (March 26, 2009)

On March 26, 2009, at six in the evening, the Opening Session of the Process of Canonization of Encarnita Ortega took place in the Alcazarén School of Valladolid, presided over by Archbishop Braulio Rodriguez Plaza of that city.

The ceremony was carried out with great simplicity, following the established protocol. The Postulator of the Cause cited some words of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, about the saints. Saints “are the true bearers of the light of history, because they are men and women of faith, hope, and love.” And the Pope added that the only purpose of causes of canonization “is the glory of God and the spiritual good of the Church and of those who seek the truth and evangelical perfection.” (Benedict XVI, April 24, 2006).

Archbishop Braulio Rodriguez stressed that the Church carries out these processes of brothers and sisters of ours to serve as an example for us and to encourage us in our Christian life. He asked those present for their prayers “so that the Archdiocesan Tribunal of Valladolid carry out its work well, seeking the truth, and to pray also for the persons who will testify before it.”

Among those present were relatives of Encarnita and many friends and acquaintances, who remember her with great affection and who go to her intercession.
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
Laguna center for palliative care

Service to the neediest: this was one of the resolutions awakened in many people by the centennial of St. Josemaría’s birth. And for several months now the Laguna Palliative Care Center has been in full operation.

Scientific progress now offers the possibility of curing many diseases that formerly were incurable and of prolonging the lives of the sick. In addition, the aging population means that in the years to come the number of patients with chronic and degenerative diseases as well as the number of geriatric patients will increase.

Thus the number of persons affected by the suffering from a progressive terminal situation is constantly growing. In the face of this social need, and inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaría, in 2002 the Laguna Palliative Care Center was opened in Madrid. This project is aimed at caring for persons with advanced debilitating or neuro-degenerative diseases, and patients who require constant care. The Fundación Vianorte is the group fostering this initiative.

St. Josemaría Escrivá, as a young priest, cared for many sick people in the neighborhood in which this new hospice is located. Today, the Latina district includes a high percentage of disadvantaged and elderly people. Therefore the city council of Madrid provided a piece of property there for the construction of a building for this purpose.

Since 2002 the Laguna Center started offering part of its services in a provisional center and through home care. But for the last few months, the newly-built facility has been in full operation.

What is palliative care?

Palliative care is active and total attention to patients whose infirmity will not respond to curative treatment. It seeks to control the pain and other symptoms, and alleviate social, psychological and spiritual problems. These are problems that not only affect the patient but also the patient’s family and surroundings. This medical specialty originated in England towards the end of the seventies.
This type of treatment affirms life and considers death as a normal process: it neither accelerates nor delays death, but tries to assure quality of life until its end. “Palliative care is made up of very simple things, small things. It stresses that an advanced illness is not a failure, but a situation in which one can still do a lot,” points out Dr. Antonio Noguera, assistant medical director of the Center.

Care for the sick person is integral, not just medical. The teams are formed by doctors, nurses, clinical helpers, social workers, and other specialists such as psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and even podiatrists and hairdressers.

“Working in an interdisciplinary team is enriching and allows each professional to learn from the others” said Dr. Noguera. This integral attention is one of the principal novelties offered by the Laguna Center. It is attained not so much through the quantity of resources, but thanks to a vision of the full needs of the person, which are not only physical or psychic, but also social and spiritual.

Aside from the global attention to the sick person, a second fundamental aspect is continuity in care. “In palliative care,” Noguera says, “people speak more and more about the plan of care, which includes good care of the patient regardless of where the person is: whether admitted to the Center or living at home.” The plan is carried out through “coordinated teams that can provide attention at any point. A common team with a common clinical history and professionals who exchange information quickly.”

To ensure the personalization of the care of each person and continuity in their plan of care, Laguna offers stages of service: medical attention at home when conditions are adequate there, with 24 hour telephone support to resolve problems or to arrange for admission; external consultations for those with sufficient autonomy; out-patient facilities, with provision for check-ups, analysis, x-rays, physical and occupational therapy... The out-patient clinic is an intermediate stage between care at home and admission to the hospital for palliative care, which is the final stage.

The out-patient clinic can care for 55 persons, 40 of whom come by arrangement with the local authorities. This is a service directed to persons
with neuro-degenerative sicknesses, especially Alzheimers. The hospital for palliative care, which is the nucleus of the work at Laguna, has 38 beds.

*A “rest” for the care giver*

In addition to hospital and home care, Laguna offers the following services: a Family Rest Unit, an outpatient Psychogeriatric Center, a Family Social Service Center, a Radiodiagnostic Service, Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation, Psychological Services, Religious Assistance Services, Mortuary, and a Center for Formation and Research.

The Family Rest Unit is aimed at helping the families of the sick person to rest properly, avoiding over-stress of the principal care-giver. The Center for Formation is putting into operation courses for persons who have a patient under their care at home, so that they can learn to care for the patient properly, and sessions for auxiliary personnel in geriatrics and nursing.

In Laguna the terminal patients are surrounded by care, but no attempt is made to have them “die without knowing it.” The dignity of the patient requires that they have an opportunity to prepare themselves for that critical moment.

Laguna also offers spiritual and religious attention to those who request it. Since it is an urgent need in the face of approaching death, this is usually very well received. This attention involves visits from the chaplain and access to the sacraments, so that patients can unite their suffering to Christ’s redemptive passion. In addition the Center has a chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved and where Holy Mass is celebrated periodically. The work of the chaplain is reinforced by the team of social workers.

*A patient, a family*

“Confronting a chronic and progressive sickness, one can say that the sick person is also in some sense a sick family,” says Dr. Noguera.

Based on this viewpoint, the social services department seeks from the first interview to detect problems and concerns within the family setting and to study their implications for the patient’s care. The family members caring for the sick person “often have concerns about whether what they are
doing is correct or not. On a purely material level, teaching them how to provide proper care and assuring them that they are doing things well gives them a lot of confidence,” Dr. Noguera explains.

At the same time, “getting them to see that what they are doing is very important even though the person cannot be cured,” helps them “to set new goals and prevents frustrations and emotional crises.”

Dr. Noguera speaks of “micro deaths,” since the process of a terminal patient involves the progressive loss of many capacities before death itself arrives. “They are gradually being left without the capacity “to do” and all that is left is “to be.” The care given shows them “that the important thing is what each person is, even if they can no longer do anything.” And all of these “micro deaths” are undergone both by the patient and by the patient’s family.

Often “the family members are overburdened because, in addition to caring for the patient, they have to do all the things that the patient used to do. This is a double burden.” For this reason, the medical director points out, “families need a lot of emotional support, and in some cases the support of a specialist, a psychologist.”

In addition to psychological care, other forms of help that are offered at Laguna for families are the above-mentioned Family Rest Unit and programs to help family members accept peacefully the death of their loved ones.

One of Laguna’s stated objectives is the development of initiatives aimed at fostering concern and support for dependent persons. For example, the Center has a network of volunteers made up especially of retired people and a small group of young people. At present there are 50 persons involved, although the intention is to double this number. They dedicate two hours a week to visiting and caring for the sick and receive beforehand courses of formation oriented towards encouraging the generosity of the volunteers themselves and reminding them of the human and supernatural fruit that this work of charity provides. At times it is enough that the volunteers learn to listen to the problems of the sick and give them some smiling words of encouragement and affection, showing them that someone is concerned about them. Other times it means
providing some pleasant conversation, or even singing some songs if the situation is appropriate.

In Brief

La Réunion, France -- First retreat on the island

On May 31, the solemnity of Pentecost, the first day of recollection preached by a priest of the Prelature took place on the French island of La Réunion, near Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. Promoted by a number of cooperators on the island, the activity was attended by about twenty people interested in sanctifying their ordinary life. Bishop Gilbert Aubry of La Réunion thanked the preacher, who had flown in from Paris, for his assistance and expressed his desire that the spirit of Opus Dei would assist in the work of evangelization on the island.

Larache, Morocco -- Expedition Xauish

A group of Madrid students from the Amura Club—a corporate work of Opus Dei for the formation of boys—has dedicated a few weeks of December to collecting new and recycled toys. Their destination was a “soup kitchen” for poor children run by a Franciscan community in the Moroccan city of Larache. There meals are provided each day for 130 children under five years of age, many of whom have never had a toy.

The students from Madrid crossed the Straits of Gibraltar on a ferry with two vans carrying the toys, called “xauish” in the local language. The volunteers also helped out in the dining room and were brought up to date
on the most pressing needs of the center in order to prepare for next year’s expedition.

Toledo, Spain -- Presentation of the Review Studia et Documenta

On Wednesday, January 28, Studia et Documenta, the publication of the St. Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute, was presented at the Caja Castilla–Lamancha Cultural Center situated in the Palacio de Benacazón. In the ceremony, organized by the Alarife Association, professors from various European universities spoke along with a researcher from the Centro de Documentación y Estudios Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (CEDEJ).

Paris, France -- Spiritual guidance

As in previous years, a study conference for diocesan priests was organized in the parish of St. Augustine on March 16. The central theme was “Spiritual Guidance for the Faithful.” Organized by priests of the Opus Dei Prelature, this annual study conference is becoming a traditional formational gathering for the clergy.

Bishop Michel Santier discussed the Biblical roots of spiritual direction and analyzed the deeply human and supernatural aspects of this practice in the Church. Father Gérard Thieux, a priest of the Opus Dei Prelature, confronted the same question in a practical perspective. He pointed to many references to the practice of spiritual direction in the works of St. Josemaría such as The Way, Furrow and The Forge, and in many of his homilies.
Ljubljana, Slovenia -- First Course on Family Development

During the current semester the first seminar on family orientation, organized by the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), was held in Ljubljana. A dozen couples took part. The coordinators of IFFD in Italy offered a general panorama of the work of this international association and presented two practical case studies about marital love. The group of family advisors as well as the participating couples discussed various practical ways to improve marital relationships.


Some forty specialists from Europe and the United States came together in London to reflect on science and religion at an international conference on the work of Mariano Artigas (1938-2006), a priest of the Opus Dei Prelature and a philosopher of science. The event was held from May 7 to 9 at the Thomas More Institute.

Taking part, among others, was Karl Giberson, one of the principal scholars working in this field in the United States and co-author with Mariano Artigas of the book Oracles of Science (Oxford University Press). Also participating were William Carroll, from the University of Oxford; Marie George, from St. John’s University, New York; Rafael Martínez and Valeria Ascheri, from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome; and Thomas Glick from Boston University. The talks addressed such questions as the treatment of science in the media, the relation between science and theology, and evolutionism.

Mariano Artigas was a pioneer in the intellectual debate between science and religion. He taught physics at the University of Barcelona, and later became a professor at the University of Navarra. His writings, consisting of more than 20 books and 300 articles, prologues, collective
studies, etc., led to many awards, including a Templeton Foundation Prize. His works have been published by Oxford University Press, Johns Hopkins University Press, the University Press of America, and the Templeton Foundation Press, with translations into German, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, and Korean.

Montevideo, Uruguay -- At the University of Montevideo

On April 1 the investiture of the new Rector of the University of Montevideo took place. The university is an initiative begun by faithful of the Opus Dei Prelature together with other people in the Uruguayan capital. The ceremony began with words of thanks by Professor Mariano Brito, the outgoing Rector, which was followed by some words from the new Rector, Professor Santiago Perez de Castillo. The closing talk was given by the Minister of Education, Maria Simón.

The new Rector pointed out three priorities: “to form professionals to build worthy men and women; to do research aimed at getting closer to the truth; and to serve society, among other ways, by providing opportunities for upward mobility.” Professor Perez del Castillo added that “a determining factor for me has been what St. Josemaría Escrivá always taught: loving the world passionately, seeking the fullness of Christian life. By doing so we give meaning to our lives.”

Arcozelo, Portugal -- Conference for priests in Enxomil

On April 27 a conference on contemporary pastoral questions was held at the Enxomil Conference Center in Arcozelo, near Oporto. This year was the 13th in the series of gatherings. The theme was “Social Expression
of the Christian Faith.” About a hundred priests from various dioceses of Portugal took part.

The morning conference was given by Bishop Manuel Clemente of Porto, who spoke on “Church-State Relations: Lessons of the Past and Challenges of the Present.” At the end of his talk he commented on some words of Benedict XVI in his apostolic trip to the African continent that stressed the Church’s role in defending the dignity of the human person and care for the poor. A part of the following discussion centered on the recent canonization of the Portuguese saint Nuno Alvares Pereira.

In the afternoon, Professor Raul Diniz, President of the AESE School of Business and Management, spoke about the intervention of Christians in public life, in light of the current economic crisis. He also discussed the possible causes of this crisis, stressing that it reminds us of the need for a stronger ethical life and a renewal of the human heart.

San José, Costa Rica -- Theological and Pedagogical Culture of the Faith

In February the first class of students for the Diploma in Theological and Pedagogical Culture of the Faith graduated at the Veragua University Center, after three years of classes and study.

The program began in February 2006 with the goal of providing a solid knowledge of the Catholic faith and the educational techniques needed to transmit it adequately, at a high academic level.

The women attending take part weekly in a theology class based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The course also includes a plan of personalized in-depth study of Sacred Scripture and the History of the Church, with specific sessions on the inculturation of the faith in Central America. The teachings of Pope Benedict XVI are another reference point for their studies. With the help of tutors, each student can ask questions about notes taken in class and about points that arose while reading the bibliography.
The diploma concludes with a research project on a freely chosen topic. In the first graduation class, these included topics from moral and mystical theology, the History of the Church and Sacred Scripture, relativism, Christian anthropology, instruction in the faith, etc. The second and third year of classes for the Diploma are continuing their studies. And a new class began working on March 7.

Valencia, Spain -- Cultures of solidarity

In January, the Mainel Foundation granted prizes for a student narrative competition in Valencia and the Balearic Islands. The topic of the competition was “Coexistence with all to create a better world.” The competition was aimed at fostering reading and creativity, and helping young people reflect on questions of solidarity and coexistence in a globalized world.

Also during that month of January, the Mainel Foundation organized a painting exposition and a “Solidarity concert” in the Mercantile Athenaeum of Valencia. The purpose of this initiative was to collect funds for the construction of a well in Nigeria, in the district of Ejuona, a small village in the State of Enugu. The works were donated by various artists and collectors. Six of them were by Nigerian painters. The concert included students from the three conservatories in Valencia: the Advanced Conservatory of Music, the José Iturbi Municipal Conservatory, and the Professional Music Conservatory.

Bao Loc, Vietnam -- Rehabilitation of a home for orphans

Following the first work camp at the Phu My orphanage in Ho Chi Minh City, organized by Warrane College in Sydney, a second service
project in Vietnam was held in January 2009. This time it took place among the tea plantations of Bao Loc, in the agricultural province of Lam Dong, some 100 miles from Ho Chi Minh City.

The group of fifteen Australian students taking part in the work camp restored one of the communal houses for orphans. They also helped out in agricultural work in the fields. During their free time they visited older orphans living in the small houses spread throughout the area.

**Pratânia, Brazil -- A social project with the municipality**

The Aclimação Cultural Center in São Paulo, with the support of the municipal council of Pratânia, has carried out once again during the vacation period the “Project Life” in the Municipal School of Basic Training “Professora Antônia Ferreira de Assumpção Antunes.” This project, which began some dozen years ago, is held in collaboration with the State to foster the common good and to increase the social conscience of university women and girls in their final years of high school. In the last few years various initiatives have been put into effect, including a course on selling products produced at home, a hall of science and art for high school students, school orientation for children, etc. The students who participate in the project make visits to families to get to know their problems and offer advice. They also provide material services and direct some of their needs to the municipal administration.

According to Alessandra Penteado, who coordinates the project and has been a volunteer for sixteen years, what moves the girls to dedicate part of their student vacations to this social service is the Christian spirit of solidarity. The girls come to realize that the gifts and talents they have received have to be put at the service of their neighbor, for both their human and spiritual well-being: “If the Lord has given you some natural quality or skill, you should not just enjoy it yourself or show off about it; you should use it charitably in the service of your neighbor. And what
better occasion than now will you find to serve, since you live with so many souls who share the same ideal as yourself?” (St. Josemaría, Furrow, no. 422).

Taboão, Brazil -- Caring for the environment

The “Women’s Association for Social and University Studies” in February organized the Seventh Studies Seminar on the Hospitality Sector, held in the Morro Velho de Taboão Social Center, on the outskirts of São Paulo. Its purpose was to promote an ecological mentality in daily life—placing emphasis on the value of small actions such as not wasting food, reducing contamination, and reusing products—and thus effectively contribute to the preservation of the environment and the strengthening of a sense of solidarity.

More than a hundred students who combine work with courses in the different schools of the Association took part. The inaugural address was by the former Municipal Secretary of Education of the city of São Paulo, Aparecida Sonvesso. This was followed by a session by Professor Tarcisico Cardieri, director of “Amana-Key,” on “Waste, environmental contamination, and public awareness.”

During the seminar various initiatives presented by participating institutions were awarded prizes, including the panel on “Reutilization of waste and garbage: a lesson in citizenship,” from the Os Pinhais Center for Professional Training; and the round table on “On waste, the use of water, and citizenship,” held by the Bateias and Casa do Moinho schools and the Morro Velho Social Center.
Valencia, Spain -- Communications media and Christian values

On March 7 the Third Study Conference on “Communications Media and Christian Values: Initiatives to Construct a More Human Society,” was held by the COSO Foundation. The conference brought together professionals who work in the means of communication and businessmen, in order to discuss possible ways for the media to transmit values in present-day society.

The topics dealt with were: “The media 2.0: dialogue of ideas and identities;” “The launching and viability of projects of digital communication;” “The influence of digital media in public opinion;” and “The Christian attitude towards suffering in contemporary films.” An expert in each of these areas led the discussions.

San José, Costa Rica -- A workshop on fashions and personality

On January 30 and 31 an overnight workshop on “Fashions and Personality” was held for girls from 14 to 17 at the Lari Center for Supplementary Education in San Jose, Costa Rica. This center arose in 1988, begun by a number of families who wanted to integrate the education that their daughters were receiving at home and in their schools. The goals are to teach them to develop intellectual habits, human virtues, solidarity with the most needy, and the ability to make good use of free time. At the same time doctrinal-religious formation activities are offered to help them live their faith in a practical way.

The January activity was aimed at opening horizons for the girls in the development of one’s personality, both in its internal aspect and in external demeanor—since the way one presents oneself, speaks and moves reflects what the person has inside. The director of the activity was Alejandra Flores de Cantillo, a corporate image advisor.
Various activities were carried out directed towards courtesy and good manners in social life, personal communication, proper use of electronic mail and language. Especially popular was a case study involving a young girl who was able to maintain her moral principles in a frivolous environment. At the end the girls drew up conclusions about the way they should act, including the need to frequently go against the current and create one's own environment, as well as to show gratitude for the care provided by their parents.

The program included practical classes on dressing well, with the choice of the proper colors and patterns for each occasion and for one's figure, and which also reflect the reality of young people with Christian ideals.

San Martinho do Porto, Portugal -- Taking advantage of Mardi Gras vacations

Since 1995 a group of more than a hundred young women from Lisbon, Oporto, Viseu and Braga, both high school and university students, have gathered during the Mardi Gras vacation period to deepen their human and Christian formation, and to carry out activities of solidarity and sports. In 2009 the gathering took place from February 20 to 24 in San Martinho do Porto. Besides the various sporting competitions, the students helped out in a home for the aged and in one for children with special needs. This activity was integrated into the plan of formation for young people carried out in the Prelature’s centers in Portugal.

New Zealand -- Educating by Example

“Chart your child’s course” is the title of a series of seminars that took place in May in the cities of Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington, sponsored by the Family Enrichment Association of New Zealand. The
principal speaker, Andrew Mullins, stressed the role of parents as educators through their good example. He also discussed practical ways of helping younger children in their interaction with the media and the new technologies. Each of the courses was limited to a maximum of 25 married couples. The same speaker gave another series of three lectures at the parish of St. Thomas More in Mount Manguani, in the northern part of the country, with an audience of about a hundred people.

Madrid, Spain -- Lecture on John Paul II’s Letter to Artists

On Sunday April 26, numerous representatives from the various artistic fields assembled in the Pontifical Basilica of St. Michael to read the “Letter to Artists,” written by John Paul II some ten years ago. The reading alternated with the presentation of musical pieces. The ceremony was preceded by a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco. In his homily the Archbishop of Madrid spoke about the Church’s need for art and artists in its mission of evangelization.

Londrina, Brazil -- The Family in Public Opinion

A group of women who take part in the Prelature’s means of Christian formation in the city of Londrina decided in 2000 to start a permanent program of reflection aimed at promoting ethical and Christian values in the media and in local public opinion. Among them are teachers, lawyers, journalists, architects and pharmacists. The majority are mothers motivated by the concern to help improve the ethical environment in which their children live.
The various meetings and debates led to the possibility of collaborating with a television network in Paraná, with a series of interviews on personal and social relationships. This cooperation with the program “Mafalda Mujer,” hosted by TV-journalist Mafalda Bongiovanni (Channel 7 on the CNT network), consists of regular weekly interviews of ten minutes on various topics such as how to combine professional activities with care for one’s home, the role of grandparents in the family, the importance of breast feeding babies, fashions, etc. The specialists taking part respond to various questions and try to provide human and Christian solutions for the difficulties affecting women today and the family as a whole.

The audience profile is heterogeneous (housewives and professional men and women of all age groups), and the number of viewers is quite high. Given the time of the transmission, many hospitals, offices and other public institutions tune in to the interviews. At present the section “Living with joy”—in which the interviews are included—has the highest audience in its time frame.

Torna ai contenuti

Betulia, Mexico -- ‘El Salto’ begins activities

On May 1 “El Salto” Conference Center in Betulia, Jalisco, in the heart of the Mexican Republic, began operations with a retreat for people from Aguascalientes, León, San Luis Potosi, and Querétero. The center has a capacity for 32 people. The blessing of the first stone took place in 2003 and now, in the first half of 2009, the first activities have begun. In the coming months a class room and auditorium will be completed as well as a school aimed at improving the human and social condition of women from the area.

Torna ai contenuti

Couvrelles, France -- Family Day in Couvrelles
For the past nineteen years, the Solemnity of the Ascension has been the date chosen for a family conference that takes place at the Couvrelles International Conference Center, an hour and a half east of Paris. On this occasion, more than 600 people took part.

After the celebration of Mass, there was a talk on the emotional education of children by a well-known editor of a family magazine and a mother who has authored various books on the topic. Taking into account the current cultural context, both speakers helped the listeners to reflect on the role of a father and a mother, and responded at length to questions raised.

Sydney, Australia -- Dialogues on Temperance

Warrane College, a university residence in Sydney, was the site of a seminar on the virtue of temperance organized in May. The speakers were Andrew Mullins (Headmaster of Redfield College and author of the book Parenting for Character), Judy Stove (director of the Restraint Project at the University of New South Wales), and the Australian historian and philosopher, James Franklin. They spoke about temperance, one of the so-called cardinal virtues, from various perspectives, including its personal and social effects. The speakers agreed that it is especially young people who are bringing this virtue back into fashion.

São Paulo, Brazil -- Horizons Program

Eighty professionals from various cities in Brazil participated in the “Horizons Program,” which was held simultaneously in the Aroeira and Ibiuna Centers of the Prelature from March 26 to 28. The goal was to
analyze the role of professionals in the new evangelization, in light of *Novo Millennio Ineunte* by Pope John Paul II and the teachings of St. Josemaría.

Among those invited to give presentations were Daniel Andrade (Government Secretary of Rio Grande do Sul), Fabio de Toledo (a judge in Campinas), and Marcio Coelho (a businessman). The variety of perspectives provided for a broad reflection on Christian social doctrine.

Daniel Andrade stressed the importance of the spiritual dimension of work and of seeing professional activity as service to others: in the workshop, in the office, the teaching post or, as in his own case, in institutional relations. Fabio de Toledo considered certain laws of special relevance at the present time from the juridical point of view. Marcio Coelho reflected on how to defend family values in the professional and social sphere. The concluding address was given by Msgr. Vicente Ancona Lopez, Regional Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei, who recalled some of the teachings of St. Josemaría during his catechetical trip to Brazil in 1974.
IN PACE
Suffrages for the Deceased

In the first half of 2009, 326 faithful of the Prelature and 20 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.

In addition to the names of all who have died during this period, we have gathered a few biographical details about some of the deceased, which give an idea of the variety of circumstances and situations in which the faithful of Opus Dei live. For reasons of space, we are not including this data in the other cases, but we must not forget that we have a debt of gratitude towards all of them for the example of fidelity they have left us. These brief sketches will help us live the Communion of Saints better with those who have preceded us to heaven.
A STUDY
Apostolicity of the Church and Apostolate of the Lay Faithful

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“The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well” (AA 2,1). This important pronouncement by the Second Vatican Council is slowly but surely permeating every corner of the Church today. The right and duty of each Christian to participate actively in the task of evangelization does not derive from any human authority in the Church, but from the simple and sublime event of baptism. Through the baptismal character, each of the faithful acquires the common priesthood with its triple function: prophetic, priestly, and royal.

Nevertheless, the baptized do not carry out their evangelizing mission in an anarchic way, as though each were acting on his or her own authority, without any relationship to the activity of others. The Gospel they are called to transmit has been received as a free gift; it has a redemptive content of which the faithful will never be the proprietor. The spread of the Gospel, as a work entrusted also to the lay faithful, has to be carried out in fidelity to the Gospel itself, which provides the criteria and orientation for their mission, within which space exists for the legitimate and fruitful spontaneity of the apostolate of the laity.

The responsibility of the lay faithful in evangelization is based on two concomitant causes: their condition as Christians and their condition as Church. For the faithful the Church is not merely an institution that provides pastoral services and guidance, but a reality constitutive of their spiritual and missionary existence. The fact that they (the laity) are Church is the source of their missionary impulse and specifies their way of acting. The apostolate of the laity, in short, is always an ecclesial apostolate, both in its personal form and in its associative form or in cooperation with the hierarchy.

All of this has a solid foundation in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which we will consider below. We will also need to look at its consequences, showing how the apostolicity of the whole Church,
which we proclaim in the Nicene Creed, leads directly to the apostolic mission that the laity carries out. This also has to be considered in the area of the specific apostolate of the laity, in the context of the relationship between the Church and the world. Finally, we will conclude the study by highlighting certain consequences regarding the relationship between secularity and ecclesial communion.

The “ecclesial” nature of the mission of the faithful

“The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (AG 2,1). The Conciliar decree *Ad Gentes* places the Church’s missionary activity, right from its opening paragraphs, in a Trinitarian perspective. The Church on earth is seen as the prolongation in human history of the visible mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. God’s self-communication to creatures is brought to completion by the missions of the Son and of the Spirit, which in turn originate in the Trinitarian processions.\(^1\) During our pilgrimage on earth, therefore, being Church means being a missionary, such that anyone who participates in this ecclesiality also participates in its missionary aspect.

This Trinitarian perspective of the ecclesial mission, set forth in nos. 2–4 of the decree *Ad Gentes*, is in reality a necessary consequence of the Trinitarian perspective of the entire ecclesial communion, as described in nos. 2—4 of the constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This Conciliar document cites some words of St. Cyprian: “Thus, the Church has been seen as ‘a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’” (LG 4, 2). Ecclesial communion is thus a participation in the intra-Trinitarian communion; and the ecclesial mission is seen as the dynamic dimension, on earth, of the divine communion.\(^2\)

This same theological context allows us to clarify the ecclesial dimension of salvation, which the decree *Ad Gentes* places at the beginning of the text: “it pleased God to call men to share in his life not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together (cf. Jn11:52)” (AG 2, 2). According to the divine plan, therefore, mankind is saved *in Ecclesia*, without this reality eliminating, naturally, the personal
dimension of salvation. Salvation is, at the same time, both personal and ecclesial. This is also stressed in the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, although formulated in a different way: “What has revealed the love of God among us is that the Father has sent into the world his only-begotten Son, so that, being made man, he might by his redemption give new life to the entire human race and unify it” (UR 2, 1). For mankind, to be regenerated and to be congregated are two dimensions of the one reality of the redemption; the saving grace is at the same time both regenerating and unifying.

The focus adopted by the Council, therefore, presents a mutual involvement between the Christian, ecclesial and missionary conditions. They cannot exist in isolation without falling into contradiction. Every missionary action is always an ecclesial (and Christian) activity; every form of evangelization, as a content of the mission, is carried out *in Ecclesia* and *ab Ecclesia*, in the Church and from the Church.

As is only natural, what is true for all Christians is also true for the lay faithful and for their apostolate in its various forms. Lay personal apostolate is always ecclesial, although often it is not an “ecclesiastical” apostolate, in the sense of taking part in public apostolic activities of the Church. As an “ecclesial” apostolate, we can consider how the attributes of the Church have a certain influence on the apostolate of the laity. Of course, among the four attributes, the Church’s apostolicity is especially in harmony with the subject of our study, and therefore we will dedicate special attention to it.

“Apostolic” nature of the mission of the faithful

First of all, we will consider the apostolicity of the Church in general. Then we will analyze the simultaneous origin of the condition of the faithful and of the hierarchical ministry in the college of the Twelve, and its consequences for our topic. Finally we will look at the relationship between apostolicity and catholicity, from the perspective of the apostolate of the faithful.

*The apostolicity of the Church*

In the Nicene Creed we find the words: “Credo... unum, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam.” “I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” The four adjectives that precede the noun “Church,”
which theology calls “properties,” have an interesting history, too extensive to be examined here. However, it is worthwhile keeping in mind that, among these four properties, apostolicity is the final one that was introduced into the profession of faith. Of course the Church was already apostolic in its origin, but the conceptual formulation of apostolicity needed the prior conceptualization of the other three properties. Apostolicity appears in the creeds of the fourth century often united to catholicity, until it finds its definitive place in the Nicene or Constantinopolitan Creed together with the other three properties.

Regardless of the historical process of the formulation of these properties, what concerns us here is to see the mutual connection among them. Fifteen centuries later, in a magisterial declaration during Pius IX’s pontificate, we read: “the true Church of Jesus Christ was constituted by divine authority and can be recognized by the four notes that we state that we believe in the creed. Each of these notes is so connected to the others that it cannot be separated from them.” The Second Vatican Council also pointed to a reciprocal connection between the four properties, precisely in the missionary area: “Thus it is plain that missionary activity wells up from the Church’s inner nature and spreads abroad her saving faith. It perfects her Catholic unity by this expansion. It is sustained by her apostolicity. It exercises the collegial spirit of her hierarchy. It bears witness to her sanctity while spreading and promoting it” (AG 6, 6).

But what is the meaning of the “apostolicity” of the Church? Following the theological tradition regarding the apostolicitas originis, fidei, successionis [apostolicity of origin, faith, and succession], the recent magisterium teaches: “The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the apostles, in three ways: 1) she was and remains built on ‘the foundation of the Apostles,’ (Eph 2:20; Acts 21:14), the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself... 2) with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching... the “good deposit,” the salutary words she has heard from the apostles... 3) she continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, ‘assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church’s supreme pastor’ (AG, 5)” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 857).
“Apostolicity of origin” stems from the missionary mandate found in Mt 28:18-20 and from that of Pentecost, when the Apostles, moved by the Spirit, began to preach the Gospel. In the divine plan, once the visible missions of the Son and the Spirit had concluded, these missions are united in their invisible actualization through the work of the Twelve. The apostles thus became the “foundation” of the Church (the secondary foundation), with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph2:20-21). What we want to emphasize here is that the whole Church has the Apostles as its origin: in them one finds “concentrated,” as it were, the entire ecclesial reality. The new believers “are added” to the early community (cf. Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 11:24; 17:4). The Church grew as a body grows, so that joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Eph 4:16). The growth of the body takes place through God’s gift, but it is important to realize that “the body itself also takes part in this.”[8]

Although before Pentecost there were also other disciples besides the Twelve, they reached the symbolic number of one hundred and twenty (cf. Acts 1:15), in clear reference to a “multiplication” of the Twelve. These disciples were also “sent,” but the formal mission command was received only by the group of Twelve. The People of Israel, who issued in their totality from the twelve sons of Jacob, maintain their continuity in the twelve Apostles, who constitute “the seeds of the new Israel” (AG 5,1). Thus St. James could begin his epistle by addressing it to the twelve tribes in the dispersion (Jas 1:1).[9]

The “apostolicity of origin” also brings into view other important facets. The Twelve are “apostles,” that is, sent out in service of the kingdom of God, with full powers.[10] The Twelve carry out their mission conscious of being “sent out,” and therefore carrying out a task that is not their own, but that they have received. God’s communication about himself, the transmission of the Gospel, is fulfilled, after Christ’s ascension, through the apostolic mission. God communicates himself to mankind through certain men. Access to the Kingdom of God is attained through
those he has sent out. In this sense, apostolicity involves the human and social dimension of the Church, in addition to its spiritual nature.[11]

In the light of the Church’s “apostolicity of origin,” the “apostolicity of doctrine” is seen as its natural consequence. Everything that we believe in the Church comes from the apostolic preaching. The faith professed in the Creed is the apostolic faith. It is interesting to see how St. Thomas Aquinas, when he considers the four notes of the Church, prefers to speak of \textit{firmitas}, “solidity,” rather than apostolicity, \[12\] since the Church’s stability consists in teaching the same doctrine as the Apostles. For St. Thomas, the apostolicity of the Church is that of its faith, and here the Angelic Doctor is consistent with the expression \textit{congregatio fidelium}, “assembly of the faithful,” which he likes to use to refer to the Church.[13]

If one looks back in history, this aspect of apostolicity, as the International Theological Commission states, “means not only that she (the Church) continues to profess the apostolic faith, but that she is committed to living it in accord with the norm of the early Church.”[14] While if we consider the mission of the Apostles looking towards the future, we see clearly that their mission consisted in preaching the Gospel. The Apostles themselves “build up the Church” by spreading the faith, “gathering into the faith” the new believers. Participation in the apostolic mission, now as then, entails substantially the same thing.

On the one hand, the apostolic mission is prolonged in time as a mission of the whole Church, as we will show in detail below. On the other hand, the ministry of the Apostles, as pastors by divine institution, finds its continuity exclusively in their successors, the bishops, with the help of the priests and deacons. This aspect of the Church’s apostolicity, called \textit{apostolicitas successionis} [apostolicity of succession], has been solemnly reaffirmed in the last Ecumenical Council: “so also the Apostles’ office of nurturing the Church is permanent, and is to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops. Therefore, the Sacred Council teaches that bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the Apostles, as shepherds of the Church, and he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and him who sent Christ (cf. \textit{Lk} 10:16)” (LG 20, 2). \textit{Lumen Gentium} explains, in the same point, the reason for the succession: “That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the
apostles, will last until the end of the world (cf. Mt 28:20), since the Gospel they are to teach is for all time the source of all life for the Church. For that very reason the Apostles were careful to appoint successors in this hierarchically constituted society” (LG 20,1).

“The Gospel they were to propagate,” although spread by the whole Church, as we have just seen, needs at the same time a specific ministry, the episcopate, so that the Gospel be “for all time the source of all life for the Church.” The Church, which transmits and spreads the Gospel, does not provide itself with the Gospel, but receives it continually from above, in the Word and in the sacraments. In the words of the International Theological Commission (ITC), one can say that: “the apostolic succession is, then, that aspect of the nature and life of the Church which shows the real dependence of the community on Christ through those he has sent out.” As a ministerial reality, the apostolic succession is “the sacrament of the active presence of Christ and the Spirit in the midst of the People of God.”[15] The ordained ministry, in which the apostolic ministry is perpetuated, reminds us that salvation, which the whole Church transmits, does not come from her, but from God.

Thus we can say: 1) the whole Church is apostolic, but only the bishops are the apostles’ successors[16]; 2) the apostolic mission is constantly extended in time by the entire Church, but the pastoral task of the Apostles subsists exclusively in the episcopal ministry (and, in a subordinate way, also in the priestly and diaconal ministry); 3) the apostolic succession is at the service of the Church’s apostolicity; as the ITC goes on to say, “this apostolicity common to the whole Church is linked to the ministerial apostolic succession, which is an ecclesial structure inalienable to the service of all Christians.”[17]

The apostolic mission, therefore, is carried out jointly by the faithful and their pastors, not in a “parallel” way but in an organic and mutually related one. In this sense, the passage from Ephesians just cited (4:15-16) provides more clarity: the effort by all the members of the Church to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ is carried out not in an anarchical way, but harmoniously, within a body joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly.
In this context we can understand better what was said earlier about ecclesiality being “concentrated” in the “apostolicity of origin.” The twelve Apostles were at the same time both faithful and pastors, and they gave origin both to the union of the faithful and to the ministry of succession. What in its origin was a single reality in the persons of the Apostles, will have to be conserved in unity in the relationship between faithful and pastors. The Church’s apostolicity thus imbues from within the relationship between community and ministry, not only as a demand of the organization of a community, nor simply as a moral imperative, but as a unifying aspect constitutive of the Church.

What has been said up to now points to a way of conceiving apostolicity more dynamically and in a qualitatively richer way than that of a simple identity between the faith of today and the apostolic preaching. Today’s Church is the same Church as that of the Apostles, but we have to add that the Church’s mission is the same apostolic mission, and that therefore it has to be carried out more apostolico, in an apostolic way. Therefore we need to rediscover the permanent and dynamic character of apostolicity: the Church, engendered by the Apostles, has to be continually “re-engendered apostolically” in every time and place.

Participation by the faithful in the apostolic mission

We recalled above that the whole Church shares in the apostolic mission. But we need to recognize that for many of today’s faithful the missionary mandate continues to be directed exclusively to the Apostles and their successors in the ministry: that is, to the bishops with the help of the priests and deacons. To awaken these slumbering consciences, St. Josemaría wrote, as far back as 1939, a well known text directed to Christians in general: “Proclaim the Good News... I shall be with you... It is Jesus who has said this... and he has said it to you.”[18] Christ’s words in Mt 28:19-20, addressed to the eleven Apostles, are here seen as a mandate addressed to all Christians.

The magisterium has addressed this issue directly in the last Council, in Ad Gentes 5,1. The evolution of early drafts of this text sheds significant light on this question. Referring to the missionary mandate in Mt 28:19-20, the early text read: “Quod munus post eos haereditavit ordo episcoporum,
una cum Successore Petri Ecclesiaque visibili Capite. In exsequendo vero hoc
mandato Ecclesia tota cooperatur, unusquisque secundum locum, officium et
gratiam in corpore.” [After them the order of bishops inherited this task,
united with Peter’s Successor and Head of the visible Church. The whole
Church cooperates, however, in carrying out this mandate, each according
to one’s place, office and gifts within the body.][19]

This text, which did not appear in the preparatory schema, was
introduced to connect the concept of mission with apostolicity. In one of
the votes presented when drawing up this text, it was pointed out that
“evangelization and the establishment of the Church have their origin and
design in God’s plan, communicated not to the people, but to the Apostles
and their successors. The ‘mitto vos’ [I send you] is pronounced for the
disciples that Christ had chosen and, precisely by this election and mission,
they are called ‘apostles,’ that is, those who are sent.” [20] One thus finds a
focus that, on the one hand, sees the mission as proceeding from
apostolicity, according to the text of Mt 28:19-20, but views the mission as
a task proper to the hierarchy (the Apostles’ successors), and the simple
faithful (“Ecclesia tota”) are left only with a role of “cooperation.” In short,
the mission conferred on the Apostles passes to the bishops; naturally, the
other faithful are involved in the mission, but not as a task received directly
from the Apostles. Thus their role is viewed as only one of cooperation
with the mission of the hierarchy.

This point of view was not accepted by the Conciliar body, especially
after the approval of Lumen Gentium, which, immediately after citing
Mt 28:19-20, states: “The Church has received this solemn mandate of
Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the Apostles and must carry it out
to the very ends of the earth” (LG 17). The subject who receives the
missionary mandate (conferred on the Apostles) is now not only the
hierarchy, but the entire Church. Lécuyer, a “peritus” or expert at the
Council, argued when voting on this text: “there is in this passage (the early
draft cited above) a theological error: the mission of the whole Church is
not only a cooperation in the fulfillment of a mandate conferred on the
hierarchy. The whole Church has been directly sent.” [21] Joseph Ratzinger,
also a Conciliar peritus, said in this regard: “subjectum activitatis missionalis
tota Ecclesia est,” the whole Church is the subject of the missionary activity, while he reserved to the hierarchy the role of “moderating” this activity.[22]

These voices were accepted by the Council, and in the new text, the textus emendatus, an equilibrium was established, thanks to a new introduction with the following words: “From the very beginning, the Lord Jesus ‘called to himself those whom he wished; and he caused twelve of them to be with him, and to be sent out preaching’ (Mt 3:13; cf. Mt 10:1-42)” (AG 5,1). “Thus the Apostles,” the text continues, “were the first budding-forth of the New Israel, and at the same time the beginning of the sacred hierarchy” (AG 5, 1). Here we have the key and definitive text, as far removed from a “hierarchical exclusivism” as it is from a dangerous “horizontalism.” As the relatio affirms: “iam in ipso initio duos aspectus adesse, inquantum apostoli, quibus mandatum activitatis missionalis impositum est, tam germen totius novi populi Dei appellandi sunt (sicut ex. gr. numerus “12” ut numerus tribuum Israel exprimit) quam exordium sacrae hierarchiae sunt” [already at the beginning two aspects are present, since the apostles, who received the missionary command, are called the seed of the whole new people of God (as for example the number “12” expresses the number of the tribes of Israel) as well as the beginning of the sacred hierarchy].[23]

It would not be acceptable, therefore, to interpret the following part of the text (slightly modified in the definitive version) as contradicting what we have just cited. AG 5,1, after mentioning the Paschal mystery and the missionary mandate, adds: “Whence the duty that lies on the Church of spreading the faith and the salvation of Christ, not only in virtue of the express command which was inherited from the Apostles by the order of bishops, assisted by the priests, together with the successor of Peter and supreme shepherd of the Church, but also in virtue of that life which flows from Christ into his members: From him the whole body, being closely joined and knit together through every joint of the system, according to the functioning in due measure of each single part, derives its increase to the building up of itself in love (Eph 4:16).”

If one starts with a superficial analysis that pays attention only to the editorial form, one might perhaps conclude that the missionary mandate explicitly affects only the order of bishops, while the body of the Church’s members carries out the apostolic mission solely thanks to the life that
Christ communicates to his members. This is, in fact, what was proposed in the Council discussion, in the final part of the Council. After these explanations hopefully it is clear that the missionary activity of the whole People of God has its foundation both in the missionary mandate, as well as in the life that Christ infuses into his members. Recently the magisterium once again emphasized “the urgency of Christ’s invitation to evangelization and why it is that the mission entrusted by the Lord to the Apostles involves all the baptized. The words of Jesus ‘go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Mt 28:19-20), are directed to everyone in the Church, each according to his own vocation.”

The missionary ministry is not conferred on the hierarchy and on the other faithful, therefore, in the same manner, because there is a difference in the mode of being an active subject in the apostolic mission. It is clear, however, that there is a direct connection between both realities (the hierarchy and the faithful) and the apostolic mission of the Twelve.

*Apostolate, apostolicity and catholicity*

We can state, therefore, that in accord with the Conciliar doctrine, the apostolic mission is entrusted to the whole Church. This enables us not only to discover once more the apostolic character of the entire assembly of the faithful, but to see the mission as a manifestation of apostolicity, at the same time as apostolicity is what configures the mission. As St. Josemaría emphasized on various occasions: “We must all feel responsible for the mission of the Church, which is the mission of Christ. He who does not have zeal for the salvation of souls; he who does not strive with all his strength to make the name and doctrine of Christ known and loved, will not understand the apostolicity of the Church.”

According to these principles, we can say that the apostolicity of the Church means that the initial and originating mission, granted to the Apostles, subsists in a permanent way in the Church. The Church continuously receives this mission and continuously carries it out. This connection between apostolate and apostolicity is found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church itself, specifically in the conclusion to the chapter
on apostolicity (no. 863). After reaffirming the connection between apostolicity of doctrine and apostolicity of succession, it adds: “The whole Church is apostolic... in that she is ‘sent out’ into the whole world. All members of the Church share in this mission, though in various ways.”

In this regard, we can once again consider the link between the apostolicity of the Church and the other properties or notes. The one that is especially relevant here is catholicity. One could even say that, at first glance, apostolicity and catholicity coincide at least in part, because both notions imply the spread of the Gospel throughout the whole world. The Church “is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race” (CCC, 831). It is worth emphasizing, in this definition, the notion of being sent and of mission, both deeply rooted in apostolicity.

Together with this “quantitative” aspect of catholicity, there is another that we could call “qualitative.” For “in her (the Church) subsists the fullness of Christ’s body united with its head (cf. Eph 1:22-23); this implies that she receives from him ‘the fullness of the means of salvation’ (Ad Gentes, 6) which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession” (CCC, 830). Thus “the universality of the Church does not depend on its geographical distribution, even though this is a visible sign and a motive of credibility. The Church was catholic already at Pentecost. It was born catholic from the wounded heart of Jesus, as a fire which the Holy Spirit enkindled.”[28]

If we compare these two aspects (catholicity and apostolicity), one could say that the Church’s mission consists in converting its indefectible qualitative catholicity into a real quantitative catholicity. But for the qualitative catholicity to become quantitative as well, the proclamation of the Gospel must be carried out in accord with a third meaning of catholicity, which we might call “intensive,” closely connected with the event that most deeply marks the catholicity of the Church: the day of Pentecost. At Pentecost the Gospel was proclaimed in a way that all were able to understand. The miracle of the plurality of tongues marks a new direction, in contrast with the division of tongues at the tower of Babel. This miracle, not destined to be repeated in the Church’s history, enjoys a
permanent ecclesiological importance. It is precisely in this third sense (intensive catholicity) that it is taken up by *Lumen Gentium* as an introduction to the study of mission (no. 13). What the Council affirms is not just a linguistic question, but, more deeply, the capacity of the Gospel to imbue and take up all the legitimate cultural diversity present in mankind. “The People of God is composed of all the peoples of the world, because it receives from all of them its citizens, who are subjects of a kingdom which is not earthly, but heavenly.” The Church fosters and takes up “all the faculties, riches, and customs which reveal the special features of each people, in what there is of good in them…but in receiving them it purifies them, strengthens them and elevates them.”

Apostolicity therefore is catholic, and catholicity is apostolic, also because the assumption in Christ of all human realities is “measured by” apostolicity. The catholic mission, in other words, is always an apostolic mission. Both properties share similar features, make reciprocal demands, and cannot be separated. If the Church, hypothetically, were to abandon the catholic aim of its mission, it would also betray its apostolic identity. And, similarly, if it did not remain faithful to the apostolic tradition it received, it would also lose its catholicity. The apostolic witness, in short, demands a catholic missionary attitude, and vice versa.

These ecclesial characteristics (the properties or notes of the Church) and their intertwining, have relevance also from the existential point of view, in the daily life of the faithful. As the recent magisterium points out: “Evangelization is not only accomplished through public preaching of the Gospel nor solely through works of public relevance, but also by means of personal witness which is always very effective in spreading the Gospel.”[29] Each of the faithful, therefore, is called to bear witness to the Paschal mystery in his or her life; their life is “apostolic” in the measure in which the “apostolic faith” takes body in it. Each of the faithful, in addition, as a member of the *congregatio fidelium* [assembly of the faithful] that is the Church, is called “to proclaim the saving truth... to the very ends of the earth” (cf. LG 17). As is natural, the “catholicity of the proclamation” is carried out by each one according to his or her possibilities, but the warning of St. Paul is valid for everyone: Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (*1 Cor* 9:16), as *Lumen Gentium* stresses right afterwards.
In order to fulfill this apostolic mission, courage and daring are required in proclaiming the truth. Paul VI said that “even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified... and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus.”[30] And it is equally clear that the proclamation of the saving truth, if not accompanied by witness to this truth in one’s own life, is destined to sterility.

The apostolic mission and sanctification of the world

What is the content of the apostolic mission? Generically, we can identify it with the spread of the Gospel. But if we consider it more closely, and taking into account the missionary mandate in Mt 28:19-20, this content can be described as a triple function: prophetic, priestly and royal. Although preserving a substantial identity, this content is received, transmitted, and exercised in different ways according to the condition of those carrying out the mission: laity, ordained ministers, consecrated religious. In the third part of our study, we will consider the specific role of the lay faithful in carrying out this mission, always within the context of the apostolicity of the Church.

First of all, we will look at some apostolic writings that speak of the Church’s mission to the world, since the situation of the lay faithful in the world is precisely what characterizes them as such. Then we will consider the importance of human work for the Church’s apostolicity and catholicity.

The relationship of Church and world

The apostolic mission that the Church exercises till the end of time consists not only in the salvation of souls, but embraces the whole of material creation. The lay faithful “by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (LG 31, 2). Therefore we will turn our attention now to the relationship between the Church and the world, since this is the context in which the laity carry out their mission.

In the New Testament, the redemption of the cosmos is described with dramatic features in Romans 8:20-21: creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. In
the heavenly Jerusalem of the Apocalypse, whose walls had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:14), we will find, besides an immense multitude (Rev 19:1), also a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1). In a passage that more directly concerns the ecclesial dimension of the redemption, we can cite the introduction to the Christological hymn in Col 1:13-20. All created realities in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible are seen as being guided towards a clear destiny: all things were created through him and for him (the Son), who is also the head of the body, the Church.

This same panorama is contemplated from the point of view of the final consummation in Ephesians 1:9-10. The mystery of his will (the will of the Father) is a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. The term “unite” here—or to translate it more literally, “recapitulate” (anakefalaiosis)—has a clear reference to the Church, given that the Christ of whom it speaks has been established as the head over all things for the Church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Eph 1:22-23).[31] The same explanation is found in Ephesians 4:15, where we are exhorted to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.[32] Furthermore, the purpose of the gifts conferred by the glorified Christ is that of building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12), that is, the Church, so that “in it, with it and by means of it the totality of the universe will grow towards Christ.”[33]

The relationship between the Church and the world is not presented as a relationship between two independent or antagonistic realities, or between two parts of a whole, but rather as the same reality, but contemplated either in its initial moment, or in the consummation to which it is destined.[34] As the Christians of the first centuries said, “the world was created for the sake of the Church.”[35] The Catechism of the Catholic Church cites this and adds: “God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the ‘convocation’ of men in Christ, and this ‘convocation’ is the Church” (CCC, 760). As a Greek Father daringly said: “if one considers its goal, the Church existed before all things.”[36]

The world, work and holiness
Catholics are called to bring all things to God, incorporating in the Body of Christ not only other men and women but also every human value. “Christ’s redemptive work,” in the words of Vatican II, “while essentially concerned with the salvation of men, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel” (AA 5,1). Revelation does not tell us how the final transformation of creation will be accomplished; we do know, however, that: “throughout the course of the centuries, men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, this human activity accords with God’s will” (Gaudium et Spes 34,1). This “effort” is, in the first place, human work, which is thus situated in the context of the “recapitulation” of the world in Christ. Gaudium et Spes continues: “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” (Ibid.).

This immense task received from the Creator, the sanctification of the world, is thus an integral part of the Church’s apostolic mission. And therefore it is directly connected to the catholicity and the apostolicity of the Church. This task is carried out above all by the lay faithful. The laity have been entrusted with the task of “seek[ing] the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God... it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ” (LG 31,2).[37] In the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá: “The layman’s specific role in the mission of the Church is precisely that of sanctifying secular reality, the temporal order, the world, from within, in an immediate and direct way.”[38] “The immediate task of directly ordering temporal realities in the light of the doctrinal principles enunciated by the Magisterium corresponds specifically to the laity, who work immersed in
all the circumstances and structures of secular life.”[39] The laity also have the mission of spreading the Gospel among their fellow men and women, whom they find in the most varied situations and circumstances that human work can create. They thus help implement both the Church’s catholicity and her apostolicity.

The sanctification of the world is closely tied to the fourth property of the Church: her holiness. The Church is holy not only because of her Founder and the presence of the Holy Spirit, not only in her institutions and faithful, but also in her activity and ends. The Church is holy and sanctifying (cf. CCC 824), and seeks to lead mankind and all creation to the holiness that will be fully attained only at the final consummation. Lumen Gentium includes in the “eschatological” holiness that the Church will attain at the end of time the participation by all creation in the process of sanctification: this eschatological holiness will take place “when there will come ‘the time of the restoration of all things’ (Acts 3:21). At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ” (cf. Eph 1:10; Col 1:20; 2 Pet3:10-13)” (LG 48,1).

This provides the theological framework needed to adequately understand the text from Apostolicam Actuositatem 2, 2 about the role of the laity. There we read: “the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.” A superficial reading of this text could lead one to separate or isolate the various tasks that the laity fulfill “in the Church” from those they carry out “in the world,” thus erasing the specific character of the laity’s mission. But such a separation would be seriously mistaken. Precisely because the Church’s apostolic mission involves the sanctification of the world, the specific task of the laity in the Church is the one they carry out in the world.[40]

Communion in the apostolic mission and secularity

The apostolate of the lay faithful, if viewed from within the apostolicity of the Church, shows the intrinsic link between secularity and ecclesial communion, thus pointing to a specific aspect of the Church’s unity. We know that ecclesial unity reaches its summit in the Eucharist. In the
Eucharist, thanks to the sacred office exercised by the Church’s ministers, secular activity is transformed into an acceptable offering... sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom15:16). The liturgy of the presentation of the gifts is very explicit in this regard: the bread, “fruit of the earth and made by human hands,” is changed for us into “the bread of life.” The wine, “fruit of the vine and work of human hands,” is turned into “our spiritual drink.” The “recapitulation” of all creation in Christ is thus anticipated in the Eucharist, and human work plays an important role here. The world, in short, through the activity of the lay faithful, becomes the “matter” which is offered to God as a spiritual sacrifice, precisely because temporal realities are ordained towards the perfection of their proper nature.[41]

This, in turn, enables us to situate secularity within ecclesial communion. It is precisely the emphasis placed on secularity that leads to a strengthening of communion. Exclusion from communion often stems from self-sufficiency, from a posture that is equivalent to saying: “I don’t need you.” According to the Pauline doctrine, the limitations of the members are in direct relation to their specific functions: because the eye is only an eye, and not a hand, it cannot say to the hand: “I don’t need you.” Thus we reach the paradoxical situation that specificity doesn’t damage, but rather strengthens communion.[42]

If one applies this principle to the properly lay dimension, we can say that the ecclesial mission in secular activities and communion with the pastors mutually imply one another, while any divergence would not be in harmony—neither on one side or the other, nor on both sides—with the apostolicity of the Church. This is a principle that is also true for all ecclesial realities, both in the terrain of the laity and in the context of consecrated life. All are called to participate in the apostolic mission, each according to their proper and specific condition, but without ever harming communion: at times working together in common apostolic projects; more frequently, each one engaged in their own specific area, but, in every case, with an open spirit, mutual recognition, and reciprocal appreciation.

_Credo unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam_. “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” To conclude these reflections, let us reaffirm decisively the intrinsic and reciprocal interconnection of the properties of the Church. That they may all be one, even as thou, Father,
art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe (Jn17:21), Jesus asked the Father, thus uniting forever the catholicity of the apostolic mission with the unity of the Church in her indefectible holiness.


[16] The succession refers to the pastoral function of the Apostles, as Lumen Gentium states (20, 2). This task does not include those elements of the Apostles’ ministry that stems from their condition as eye-witnesses of the paschal mystery. On this subject, see Dalla Pasqua alla Parusia, op. cit., 352-370.


[22] “Quia Ecclesia Dei in activitate sua ab hierarchia moderatur, moderamen missionum eodem modo res hierarchiae est”: Considerationes quoad fundamentum theologicum missionis Ecclesiae, in Congar Dossier relating to the decree Ad gentes, IV (O), reproduced in Enrique Borda, op. cit., Apendix III, no. 5, p. 251. These considerations were read in the previous session, but they refer to the same topic. Cf. also Acta Synodalía IV/III, 740-741; IV/IV, 153, 523.
Acta Synodalia IV/IV, 271. A few lines later the same idea is emphasized again: ”Sic iam ex ipso initio indicatur nunc et officium totius Ecclesiae et mandatum speciale, quod hierarchiae ecclesiasticae competit."

The text was not modified because, citing the words of the doctrinal commission, “a) solummodo differentia missionis hierarchiae et membrorum non hierarchicorum insinuatur; b) ex citatione Eph. 4, 17 et ex sequentibus communis affectio virtute vitae patet.” Acta Synodalia IV/VII, 20-21.

The Council’s teaching here has not yet been well assimilated, in spite of the fact that more than forty years have passed since the publication of the Conciliar documents. As one reads in the presentation of the book, Los Laicos en la eclesiología del Concilio Vaticano II. Santificar el mundo desde dentro (ed. by Ramiro Pellitero, Rialp, Madrid, 2006), “the putting into practice of the Second Vatican Council is still today the great challenge and the great task confronting the Church and Christians” (p. 7).


St. Josemaría, In Love with the Church, no. 15.

Ibid., no. 9.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization, op. cit., no. 11.

Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi, December 8, 1975, no. 22.


Ibid., 324.

Ibid., 325.


Hermas, The Shepherd, II, 4, 1, in Fuentes Patríticas, Vol. 6, Ciudad Nueva, Madrid 1995. Bilingual edition prepared by Juan José Ayan Calvo,
p. 79.

[36] St. Epiphanius, *Panarion seu adversus LXXX haereses*, 1,1,5, in PG 41, 181C.

[37] As Msgr. Gérard Philips, also a Conciliar peritus and author of the initial schema of the second version of the Const. Lumen Gentium, wrote: “the expression ‘throw light upon’ was intentionally chosen. If the laity do not respect temporal values or underestimate them, they will not ‘throw light’ on them; they will destroy them” (cf. *La Iglesia y su misterio…*, Vol II, Herder, Barcelona 1969, op. cit., 31).

[38] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 9.

[39] Ibid., no. 11.


[41] Cf. Ibid., 16.