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

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

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

During four days in September, from Thursday the 16th until Sunday the 19th, Benedict XVI made an historic trip to the United Kingdom that was rich in significance. In the prayer vigil before the beatification of Cardinal Newman, the Holy Father stressed that “each of us has a mission; each of us is called to change the world, to work for a culture of life, a culture forged by love and respect for the dignity of each human person.”[1]

In *Friends of God* St. Josemaría wrote forcefully: “I want you to be rebels, free and unfettered, because I want you—it is Christ who wants us!—to be children of God.”[2] Both the Pope’s words and those of St. Josemaría point to an important truth: every man and woman has to strive to appreciate better each day the core of their dignity and the basis of their mission: the freedom of the sons and daughters of God.

St. Josemaría urged those he dealt with to have the courage to be free, with the risk and responsibility that this entails. The Holy Father, in the vigil ceremony before the beatification, said: “as men and women made in the image and likeness of God, we were created to know the truth, to find in that truth our ultimate freedom and the fulfillment of our deepest human aspirations.”[3]

During his life, St. Josemaría raised his voice against the growing “depersonalization” he saw in society around him: a crowd mentality, alienation, totalitarianism and dictatorships, clericalism…. Also today, the Pope said, “a ‘dictatorship of relativism’ threatens to obscure the unchanging truth about man’s nature, his destiny and his ultimate good.”[4] Confronted with these attacks on the person and human freedom, a Christian needs to launch out in defense of the dignity of every human being.

However, a mistaken notion of human freedom is also widespread today. If freedom is seen as merely the capacity to choose, without first seeking the truth, or as a excuse to free oneself from the task of constructing a just society, abdicating or ceding one’s own rights, then we could ask what sense it makes to defend that freedom. The founder of Opus Dei insisted that freedom, in its principal and radical meaning, is
freedom before God and for God, assisting his creative action. True freedom entails a commitment, an obligation to God, to the world, and to ourselves.

Thus freedom is inseparably united to responsibility. Each exercise of our freedom is necessarily accompanied by a series of consequences that make demands on each one of us. Freedom and responsibility mutually enrich one another in our personal growth. St. Josemaría highlighted as a manifestation of responsible freedom the active participation of Christians together with other citizens in the most varied types of associations, unions, political parties, etc., in order to intervene and be present in the human decisions on which the present and the future of society depend: “Freely, according to your own interests and talents, you have to take an active, effective part in the wholesome public or private associations of your country, in a way that is full of the Christian spirit. Such organizations never fail to make some difference to people's temporal or eternal good.”[5] But above all, Christians have an influence on society through their presence, their example, and their apostolate, fulfilling their family and professional duties in a “unity of life”: being a contemplative in the midst of the world.[6]

The Pope said in England that “we are challenged to proclaim with renewed conviction the reality of our reconciliation and liberation in Christ, and to propose the truth of the Gospel as the key to an authentic and integral human development.”[7] The great challenges of history have to find Christians prepared, with a strong sense of responsibility, as St. Josemaría insisted tirelessly: “We children of God, who are citizens with the same standing as any others, have to take part fearlessly in all honest human activities and organizations, so that Christ may be present in them. Our Lord will ask a strict account of each one of us if through neglect or love of comfort we do not freely strive to play a part in the human developments and decisions on which the present and future of society depend.”[8]

But making Christ present in temporal affairs does not mean imposing a single perspective, as though there existed only one solution, the “Catholic” one.[9] Rather it means defending freedom in the immense
gamut of what is open to opinion, whether in political, social, economic, cultural, theological, philosophical, scientific or artistic questions.

The founder of Opus Dei contrasted the recognition of this healthy and legitimate pluralism, characteristic of a lay mentality (that is, a way of thinking grounded in freedom and personal responsibility) with a conception of freedom typical of both clericalism and of a secular “laicism,” a freedom that fails to respect the just autonomy of temporal realities and the laws established by God in his creatures. “When one understands in depth the value of freedom, when one passionately loves this divine gift of the soul, one also loves the pluralism that freedom brings with it.”

In defending freedom as an essential characteristic of the secularity of the lay faithful, St. Josemaría did not mean to say that freedom was absent among clerics or religious. Rather he wanted to emphasize that the activity of the laity in the world has to be marked by freedom—“there are no dogmas in temporal affairs,” he used to say. But it is a freedom that is guided by the truths of the faith and principally by the Truth which is Christ.

A Christian’s faith needs to illumine all temporal concerns, since one does not cease being a Christian when becoming a member of congress, a doctor, an architect, or a housewife. Each, in accord with their circumstances, is called to sanctify their family and work in the world, to bring them to Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI too has insisted that for Christians “there can be no separation between what we believe and the way we live our lives.” “I appeal in particular to you, the lay faithful, in accordance with your baptismal calling and mission, not only to be examples of faith in public, but also to put the case for the promotion of faith’s wisdom and vision in the public forum. Society today needs clear voices which propose our right to live, not in a jungle of self-destructive and arbitrary freedoms, but in a society which works for the true welfare of its citizens and offers them guidance and protection in the face of their weakness and fragility. Do not be afraid to take up this service to your brothers and sisters, and to the future of your beloved nation.” However, as the Roman Pontiff also pointed out, “the role of religion in political debate is not so much to
supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers—still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion—but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles.”[14]

From here flows the healthy pluralism mentioned above. To try to link the Christian faith to a specific position in the temporal area, no matter how well-intentioned this may be, would be a form of clericalism and tyranny, St. Josemaría insisted, because it would mean annulling the personal freedom of others. He went so far as to affirm: “It is not in accordance with the dignity of man to fix absolute truths in questions where necessarily each person will look at things from his own viewpoint, according to his particular interests, his cultural preferences, his personal experience.”[15] In fact, the recognition of the dignity of the human person requires not only tolerating, but also welcoming the viewpoints of others as an enrichment, while the attempt to set “absolute truths” in these temporal questions open to opinion represents an impoverishment, a lack of trust in the contribution of others to the truth.

St. Josemaría always strove to see freedom, in its deepest sense, through the light the Holy Spirit granted him about a Christian’s divine filiation. The freedom of the children of God is the greatest treasure we have received from the Creator, which Christ gained for us by his redemptive death. On the cross, in a sublime way and with full freedom, Christ showed his infinite love for the will of the Father and his desire to free all mankind from the slavery of sin, and through his Resurrection attained for us victory over death.

In Glasgow, the Holy Father invited his listeners to seek Christ with their whole heart and strength: “Search for him, know him and love him, and he will set you free from slavery to the glittering but superficial existence frequently proposed by today’s society. Put aside what is worthless and learn of your own dignity as children of God.”[16]


[6] See, Furrow, no. 497; The Forge, no. 740; etc.


[10] Ibid., no. 98.


[12] Benedict XVI, Greetings at the vigil… cit.


HOLY SEE

• The Roman Pontiff
Introduction

"The word of the lord abides for ever." This word is the Gospel which was preached to you" (1 Pet 1:25; cf. Is 40:8). With this assertion from the First Letter of Saint Peter, which takes up the words of the Prophet Isaiah, we find ourselves before the mystery of God, who has made himself known through the gift of his word. This word, which abides for ever, entered into time. God spoke his eternal Word humanly; his Word "became flesh" (Jn 1:14). This is the good news. This is the proclamation which has come down the centuries to us today. The Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, meeting in the Vatican from 5-26 October 2008, had as its theme: The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. It was a profound experience of encounter with Christ, the Word of the Father, who is present where two or three are gathered in his name (cf. Mt 18:20). With this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation I readily respond to the request of the Synod Fathers to make known to the whole People of God the rich fruits which emerged from the synodal sessions and the recommendations which resulted from our common endeavor.[1] Consequently, I intend to revisit the work of the Synod in the light of its documents: the Lineamenta, the Instrumentum Laboris, the Relationes ante and post disceptationem, the texts of the interventions, both those delivered on the Synod floor and those presented in written form, the reports of the smaller discussion groups, the Final Message to the People of God and, above all, a number of specific proposals (Propositiones ) which the Fathers considered especially significant. In this way I wish to point out certain fundamental approaches to a rediscovery of God’s word in the life of the Church as a wellspring of constant renewal. At the same time I express my hope that the word will be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity.
That our joy may be complete

Before all else, I would like to call to mind the beauty and pleasure of the renewed encounter with the Lord Jesus which we experienced during the synodal assembly. In union with with the Synod Fathers, then, I address all the faithful in the words of Saint John in his first letter: “We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and which was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:2-3). The Apostle speaks to us of hearing, seeing, touching and looking upon (cf. 1 Jn 1:1) the word of life, since life itself was made manifest in Christ. Called to communion with God and among ourselves, we must proclaim this gift. From this kerygmatic standpoint, the synodal assembly was a testimony, before the Church and before the world, to the immense beauty of encountering the word of God in the communion of the Church. For this reason I encourage all the faithful to renew their personal and communal encounter with Christ, the word of life made visible, and to become his heralds, so that the gift of divine life — communion — can spread ever more fully throughout the world. Indeed, sharing in the life of God, a Trinity of love, is complete joy (cf. 1 Jn 1:4). And it is the Church’s gift and unescapable duty to communicate that joy, born of an encounter with the person of Christ, the Word of God in our midst. In a world which often feels that God is superfluous or extraneous, we confess with Peter that he alone has “the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). There is no greater priority than this: to enable the people of our time once more to encounter God, the God who speaks to us and shares his love so that we might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10).

From “Dei Verbum” to the Synod on the Word of God

With the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, we were conscious of dealing in a certain sense with the very heart of the Christian life, in continuity with the previous synodal assembly on The Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission. Indeed, the Church is built upon the word of God; she is born from and lives by that word.[2] Throughout its history, the People of God has always found strength in the word of God, and
today too the ecclesial community grows by hearing, celebrating and studying that word. It must be acknowledged that in recent decades ecclesial life has grown more sensitive to this theme, particularly with reference to Christian revelation, the living Tradition and sacred Scripture. Beginning with the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII, we can say that there has been a crescendo of interventions aimed at an increased awareness of the importance of the word of God and the study of the Bible in the life of the Church, culminating in the Second Vatican Council and specifically in the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum. The latter represented a milestone in the Church’s history: “The Synod Fathers … acknowledge with gratitude the great benefits which this document brought to the life of the Church, on the exegetical, theological, spiritual, pastoral and ecumenical plane”. The intervening years have also witnessed a growing awareness of the “trinitarian and salvation-historical horizon of revelation” against which Jesus Christ is to be acknowledged as “mediator and fullness of all revelation”. To each generation the Church unceasingly proclaims that Christ “completed and perfected revelation. Everything to do with his presence and his self-manifestation was involved in achieving this: his words and works, signs and miracles, but above all his death and resurrection from the dead, and finally his sending of the Spirit of truth”.

Everyone is aware of the great impulse which the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum gave to the revival of interest in the word of God in the life of the Church, to theological reflection on divine revelation and to the study of sacred Scripture. In the last forty years, the Church’s magisterium has also issued numerous statements on these questions. By celebrating this Synod, the Church, conscious of her continuing journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, felt called to further reflection on the theme of God’s word, in order to review the implementation of the Council’s directives, and to confront the new challenges which the present time sets before Christian believers.

The Synod of Bishops on the Word of God

In the twelfth synodal assembly, Bishops from throughout the world gathered around the word of God and symbolically placed the text of the Bible at the centre of the assembly, in order to stress anew something we
risk taking for granted in everyday life: the fact that God speaks and responds to our questions.[9] Together we listened to and celebrated the word of the Lord. We recounted to one another all that the Lord is doing in the midst of the People of God, and we shared our hopes and concerns. All this made us realize that we can deepen our relationship with the word of God only within the “we” of the Church, in mutual listening and acceptance. Hence our gratitude for the testimonies about the life of the Church in different parts of the world which emerged from the various interventions on the floor. It was also moving to hear the fraternal delegates, who accepted our invitation to take part in the synodal meeting. I think in particular of the meditation offered to us by His Holiness Bartholomaios I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, for which the Fathers expressed deep appreciation.[10] Furthermore, for the first time ever, the Synod of Bishops also invited a rabbi to offer us a precious witness on the Hebrew Scriptures, which are also part of our own sacred Scriptures.[11]

In this way we were able to acknowledge with joy and gratitude that “in the Church there is also a Pentecost today — in other words, the Church speaks in many tongues, and not only outwardly, in the sense that all the great languages of the world are represented in her, but, more profoundly, inasmuch as present within her are various ways of experiencing God and the world, a wealth of cultures, and only in this way do we come to see the vastness of the human experience and, as a result, the vastness of the word of God”. [12] We were also able to see an ongoing Pentecost; various peoples are still waiting for the word of God to be proclaimed in their own language and in their own culture.

How can I fail to mention that throughout the Synod we were accompanied by the testimony of the Apostle Paul! It was providential that the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly took place during the year dedicated to the great Apostle of the Nations on the two thousandth anniversary of his birth. Paul’s life was completely marked by his zeal for the spread of God’s word. How can we not be moved by his stirring words about his mission as a preacher of the word of God: “I do everything for the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:23); or, as he writes in the Letter to the Romans: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to every
one who has faith” (1:16). Whenever we reflect on the word of God in the life and mission of the Church, we cannot but think of Saint Paul and his life spent in spreading the message of salvation in Christ to all peoples.

The Prologue of John’s Gospel as a guide

With this Apostolic Exhortation I would like the work of the Synod to have a real effect on the life of the Church: on our personal relationship with the sacred Scriptures, on their interpretation in the liturgy and catechesis, and in scientific research, so that the Bible may not be simply a word from the past, but a living and timely word. To accomplish this, I would like to present and develop the labours of the Synod by making constant reference to the Prologue of John’s Gospel (Jn 1:1-18), which makes known to us the basis of our life: the Word, who from the beginning is with God, who became flesh and who made his dwelling among us (cf. Jn 1:14). This is a magnificent text, one which offers a synthesis of the entire Christian faith. From his personal experience of having met and followed Christ, John, whom tradition identifies as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20), “came to a deep certainty: Jesus is the Wisdom of God incarnate, he is his eternal Word who became a mortal man”. May John, who “saw and believed” (cf. Jn 20:8) also help us to lean on the breast of Christ (cf. Jn 13:25), the source of the blood and water (cf. Jn 19:34) which are symbols of the Church’s sacraments. Following the example of the Apostle John and the other inspired authors, may we allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit to an ever greater love of the word of God.

PART ONE

VERBUM DEI

“In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God…
and the Word became flesh”
(Jn 1:1, 14)

The God Who Speaks
God in dialogue

The novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us.\[^{14}\] The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* had expressed this by acknowledging that the unseen God “from the fullness of his love, addresses men and women as his friends, and lives among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company”.\[^{15}\] Yet we would not yet sufficiently grasp the message of the Prologue of Saint John if we stopped at the fact that God enters into loving communion with us. In reality, the Word of God, through whom “all things were made” (Jn 1:3) and who “became flesh” (Jn 1:14), is the same Word who is “in the beginning” (Jn 1:1). If we realize that this is an allusion to the beginning of the book of Genesis (cf. Gen 1:1), we find ourselves faced with a beginning which is absolute and which speaks to us of the inner life of God. The Johannine Prologue makes us realize that the Logos is truly eternal, and from eternity is himself God. God was never without his Logos. The Word exists before creation. Consequently at the heart of the divine life there is communion, there is absolute gift. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:16), as the same Apostle tells us elsewhere, thus pointing to “the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny”.\[^{16}\] God makes himself known to us as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters his Word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently the Word, who from the beginning is with God and is God, reveals God himself in the dialogue of love between the divine persons, and invites us to share in that love. Created in the image and likeness of the God who is love, we can thus understand ourselves only in accepting the Word and in docility to the work of the Holy Spirit. In the light of the revelation made by God’s Word, the enigma of the human condition is definitively clarified.

*The analogy of the word of God*

In the light of these considerations, born of meditation on the Christian mystery expressed in the Prologue of John, we now need to consider what the Synod Fathers affirmed about the different ways in which we speak of “the word of God”. They rightly referred to a symphony of the word, to a single word expressed in multiple ways: “a polyphonic hymn”.\[^{17}\] The Synod Fathers pointed out that human language operates
analogically in speaking of the word of God. In effect, this expression, while referring to God’s self-communication, also takes on a number of different meanings which need to be carefully considered and related among themselves, from the standpoint both of theological reflection and pastoral practice. As the Prologue of John clearly shows us, the Logos refers in the first place to the eternal Word, the only Son, begotten of the Father before all ages and consubstantial with him: the word was with God, and the word was God. But this same Word, Saint John tells us, “became flesh” (Jn 1:14); hence Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, is truly the Word of God who has become consubstantial with us. Thus the expression “word of God” here refers to the person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, made man.

While the Christ event is at the heart of divine revelation, we also need to realize that creation itself, the liber naturae, is an essential part of this symphony of many voices in which the one word is spoken. We also profess our faith that God has spoken his word in salvation history; he has made his voice heard; by the power of his Spirit “he has spoken through the prophets”.[18] God’s word is thus spoken throughout the history of salvation, and most fully in the mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God. Then too, the word of God is that word preached by the Apostles in obedience to the command of the Risen Jesus: “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). The word of God is thus handed on in the Church’s living Tradition. Finally, the word of God, attested and divinely inspired, is sacred Scripture, the Old and New Testaments. All this helps us to see that, while in the Church we greatly venerate the sacred Scriptures, the Christian faith is not a “religion of the book”: Christianity is the “religion of the word of God”, not of “a written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word”.[19] Consequently the Scripture is to be proclaimed, heard, read, received and experienced as the word of God, in the stream of the apostolic Tradition from which it is inseparable.[20]

As the Synod Fathers stated, the expression “word of God” is used analogically, and we should be aware of this. The faithful need to be better helped to grasp the different meanings of the expression, but also to understand its unitary sense. From the theological standpoint too, there is
a need for further study of how the different meanings of this expression are interrelated, so that the unity of God’s plan and, within it, the centrality of the person of Christ, may shine forth more clearly.[21]

**The cosmic dimension of the word**

When we consider the basic meaning of the word of God as a reference to the eternal Word of God made flesh, the one Saviour and mediator between God and humanity,[22] and we listen to this word, we are led by the biblical revelation to see that it is the foundation of all reality. The Prologue of Saint John says of the divine Logos, that “all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (Jn 1:3); and in the Letter to the Colossians it is said of Christ, “the first-born of all creation (1:15), that “all things were created through him and for him” (1:16). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews likewise states that “by faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear” (11:3).

For us, this proclamation is a word of freedom. Scripture tells us that everything that exists does not exist by chance but is willed by God and part of his plan, at whose center is the invitation to partake, in Christ, in the divine life. Creation is born of the Logos and indelibly bears the mark of the creative Reason which orders and directs it; with joy-filled certainty the psalms sing: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth” (Ps 33:6); and again, “he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth” (Ps 33:9). All reality expresses this mystery: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). Thus sacred Scripture itself invites us to acknowledge the Creator by contemplating his creation (cf. Wis 13:5; Rom 1:19-20). The tradition of Christian thought has developed this key element of the symphony of the word, as when, for example, Saint Bonaventure, who in the great tradition of the Greek Fathers sees all the possibilities of creation present in the Logos,[23] states that “every creature is a word of God, since it proclaims God”. The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* synthesized this datum when it stated that “God, who creates and conserves all things by his word (cf. Jn 1:3), provides constant evidence of himself in created realities”.}[25]
The creation of man

Reality, then is born of the word, as *creatura Verbi*, and everything is called to serve the word. Creation is the setting in which the entire history of the love between God and his creation develops; hence human salvation is the reason underlying everything. Contemplating the cosmos from the perspective of salvation history, we come to realize the unique and singular position occupied by man in creation: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). This enables us to acknowledge fully the precious gifts received from the Creator: the value of our body, the gift of reason, freedom and conscience. Here too we discover what the philosophical tradition calls “the natural law”. In effect, “every human being who comes to consciousness and to responsibility has the experience of an inner call to do good” and thus to avoid evil. As Saint Thomas Aquinas says, this principle is the basis of all the other precepts of the natural law. Listening to the word of God leads us first and foremost to value the need to live in accordance with this law “written on human hearts” (cf. Rom 2:15; 7:23). Jesus Christ then gives mankind the new law, the law of the Gospel, which takes up and eminently fulfils the natural law, setting us free from the law of sin, as a result of which, as Saint Paul says, “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it” (Rom 7:18). It likewise enables men and women, through grace, to share in the divine life and to overcome their selfishness.

The realism of the word

Those who know God’s word also know fully the significance of each creature. For if all things “hold together” in the one who is “before all things” (cf. Col 1:17), then those who build their lives on his word build in a truly sound and lasting way. The word of God makes us change our concept of realism: the realist is the one who recognizes in the word of God the foundation of all things. This realism is particularly needed in our own time, when many things in which we trust for building our lives, things in which we are tempted to put our hopes, prove ephemeral. Possessions, pleasure and power show themselves sooner or later to be incapable of fulfilling the deepest yearnings of the human heart. In building our lives we need solid foundations which will endure when human certainties fail. Truly, since “for ever, O Lord, your word is firmly
fixed in the heavens” and the faithfulness of the Lord “endures to all generations” (Ps 119:89-90), whoever builds on this word builds the house of his life on rock (cf. Mt 7:24). May our heart be able to say to God each day: “You are my refuge and my shield; I hope in your word” (Ps 119:114), and, like Saint Peter, may we entrust ourselves in our daily actions to the Lord Jesus: “At your word I will let down the nets” (Lk 5:5).

**Christology of the word**

From this glimpse at all reality as the handiwork of the Blessed Trinity through the divine Word, we can understand the statement made by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews: “in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (1:1-2). It is very beautiful to see how the entire Old Testament already appears to us as a history in which God communicates his word: indeed, “by his covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen 15:18) and, through Moses, with the race of Israel (cf. Ex 24:8), he gained a people for himself, and to them he revealed himself in words and deeds as the one, living and true God. It was his plan that Israel might learn by experience God’s ways with humanity and, by listening to the voice of God speaking to them through the prophets, might gradually understand his ways more fully and more clearly, and make them more widely known among the nations (cf. Ps 21:28-29; 95:1-3; Is 2:1-4; Jer 3:17)”.[32]

This “condescension” of God is accomplished surpassingly in the incarnation of the Word. The eternal Word, expressed in creation and communicated in salvation history, in Christ became a man, “born of woman” (Gal 4:4). Here the word finds expression not primarily in discourse, concepts or rules. Here we are set before the very person of Jesus. His unique and singular history is the definitive word which God speaks to humanity. We can see, then, why “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a definitive direction”. [33] The constant renewal of this encounter and this awareness fills the hearts of believers with amazement at God’s initiative, which human beings, with our own reason and imagination, could never have dreamt of. We are speaking of an unprecedented and humanly inconceivable novelty: “the word became flesh
and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14a). These words are no figure of speech; they point to a lived experience! Saint John, an eyewitness, tells us so: “We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14b). The apostolic faith testifies that the eternal Word became one of us. The divine Word is truly expressed in human words.

The patristic and medieval tradition, in contemplating this “Christology of the word”, employed an evocative expression: the word was “abbreviated”.[34] “The Fathers of the Church found in their Greek translation of the Old Testament a passage from the prophet Isaiah that Saint Paul also quotes in order to show how God’s new ways had already been foretold in the Old Testament. There we read: ‘The Lord made his word short, he abbreviated it’ (Is 10:23; Rom 9:28) … The Son himself is the Word, the Logos: the eternal word became small — small enough to fit into a manger. He became a child, so that the word could be grasped by us”. [35] Now the word is not simply audible; not only does it have a voice, now the word has a face, one which we can see: that of Jesus of Nazareth.[36]

Reading the Gospel accounts, we see how Jesus’ own humanity appears in all its uniqueness precisely with regard to the word of God. In his perfect humanity he does the will of the Father at all times; Jesus hears his voice and obeys it with his entire being; he knows the Father and he keeps his word (cf. Jn 8:55); he speaks to us of what the Father has told him (cf. Jn 12:50); I have given them the words which you gave me” (Jn 17:8). Jesus thus shows that he is the divine Logos which is given to us, but at the same time the new Adam, the true man, who unfailingly does not his own will but that of the Father. He “increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52). In a perfect way, he hears, embodies and communicates to us the word of God (cf. Lk 5:1).

Jesus’ mission is ultimately fulfilled in the paschal mystery: here we find ourselves before the “word of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18). The word is muted; it becomes mortal silence, for it has “spoken” exhaustively, holding back nothing of what it had to tell us. The Fathers of the Church, in pondering this mystery, attributed to the Mother of God this touching phrase: “Wordless is the Word of the Father, who made every creature which speaks, lifeless are the eyes of the one at whose word and whose nod
all living things move”.[37] Here that “greater” love, the love which gives its life for its friends (cf. Jn 15:13), is truly shared with us.

In this great mystery Jesus is revealed as the word of the new and everlasting covenant: divine freedom and human freedom have definitively met in his crucified flesh, in an indissoluble and eternally valid compact. Jesus himself, at the Last Supper, in instituting the Eucharist, had spoken of a “new and everlasting covenant” in the outpouring of his blood (cf. Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20), and shows himself to be the true sacrificial Lamb who brings about our definitive liberation from slavery.[38]

In the most luminous mystery of the resurrection, this silence of the word is shown in its authentic and definitive meaning. Christ, the incarnate, crucified and risen Word of God, is Lord of all things; he is the victor, the Pantocrator, and so all things are gathered up forever in him (cf. Eph 1:10). Christ is thus “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12), the light which “shines in the darkness” (Jn 1:5) and which the darkness has not overcome (cf. Jn 1:5). Here we come to understand fully the meaning of the words of Psalm 119: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (v. 105); the risen Word is this definitive light to our path. From the beginning, Christians realized that in Christ the word of God is present as a person. The word of God is the true light which men and women need. In the resurrection the Son of God truly emerged as the light of the world. Now, by living with him and in him, we can live in the light.

Here, at the heart, as it were, of the “Christology of the word”, it is important to stress the unity of the divine plan in the incarnate Word: the New Testament thus presents the paschal mystery as being in accordance with the sacred Scriptures and as their deepest fulfillment. Saint Paul, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, states that Jesus Christ died for our sins “in accordance with the Scriptures” (15:3) and that he rose on the third day “in accordance with the Scriptures” (15:4). The Apostle thus relates the event of the Lord’s death and resurrection to the history of the Old Covenant of God with his people. Indeed, he shows us that from that event history receives its inner logic and its true meaning. In the paschal mystery “the words of Scripture” are fulfilled; in other words, this death which took place “in accordance with the Scriptures” is an event containing a logos, an inner logic: the death of Christ testifies that the word of God became
thoroughly human “flesh”, human “history”. [39] Similarly, the resurrection of Jesus takes place “on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”: since Jewish belief held that decay set in after the third day, the word of Scripture is fulfilled in Jesus who rises incorrupt. Thus Saint Paul, faithfully handing on the teaching of the Apostles (cf. 1 Cor 15:3), stresses that Christ’s victory over death took place through the creative power of the word of God. This divine power brings hope and joy: this, in a word, is the liberating content of the paschal revelation. At Easter, God reveals himself and the power of the trinitarian love which shatters the baneful powers of evil and death.

Calling to mind these essential elements of our faith, we can contemplate the profound unity in Christ between creation, the new creation and all salvation history. To use an example, we can compare the cosmos to a “book” — Galileo himself used this example — and consider it as “the work of an author who expresses himself through the ‘symphony’ of creation. In this symphony one finds, at a certain point, what would be called in musical terms a ‘solo’, a theme entrusted to a single instrument or voice which is so important that the meaning of the entire work depends on it. This ‘solo’ is Jesus. … The Son of Man recapitulates in himself earth and heaven, creation and the Creator, flesh and Spirit. He is the centre of the cosmos and of history, for in him converge without confusion the author and his work” [40]

**The eschatological dimension of the word of God**

In all of this, the Church gives voice to her awareness that with Jesus Christ she stands before the definitive word of God: he is “the first and the last” (*Rev* 1:17). He has given creation and history their definitive meaning; and hence we are called to live in time and in God’s creation within this eschatological rhythm of the word; “thus the Christian dispensation, since it is the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *1 Tim* 6:14 and *Tit* 2:13)” [41]. Indeed, as the Fathers noted during the Synod, the “uniqueness of Christianity is manifested in the event which is Jesus Christ, the culmination of revelation, the fulfillment of God’s promises and the mediator of the encounter between man and God. He who ‘has made God
known’ (Jn 1:18) is the one, definitive word given to mankind”. \[42\] Saint John of the Cross expresses this truth magnificently: “Since he has given us his Son, his only word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything at once in this sole word — and he has no more to say... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has spoken all at once by giving us this All who is his Son. Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely on Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty”. \[43\]

Consequently the Synod pointed to the need to “help the faithful to distinguish the word of God from private revelations” \[44\] whose role “is not to ‘complete’ Christ’s definitive revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history”. \[45\] The value of private revelations is essentially different from that of the one public revelation: the latter demands faith; in it God himself speaks to us through human words and the mediation of the living community of the Church. The criterion for judging the truth of a private revelation is its orientation to Christ himself. If it leads us away from him, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit, who guides us more deeply into the Gospel, and not away from it. Private revelation is an aid to this faith, and it demonstrates its credibility precisely because it refers back to the one public revelation. Ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation essentially means that its message contains nothing contrary to faith and morals; it is licit to make it public and the faithful are authorized to give to it their prudent adhesion. A private revelation can introduce new emphases, give rise to new forms of piety, or deepen older ones. It can have a certain prophetic character (cf. 1 Thess 5:19-21) and can be a valuable aid for better understanding and living the Gospel at a certain time; consequently it should not be treated lightly. It is a help which is proffered, but its use is not obligatory. In any event, it must be a matter of nourishing faith, hope and love, which are for everyone the permanent path of salvation. \[46\]

**The word of God and the Holy Spirit**

After reflecting on God’s final and definitive word to the world, we need now to mention the mission of the Holy Spirit in relation to the divine word. In fact there can be no authentic understanding of Christian
revelation apart from the activity of the Paraclete. This is due to the fact that God’s self-communication always involves the relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit, whom Irenaeus of Lyons refers to as “the two hands of the Father”. Sacred Scripture itself speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in salvation history and particularly in the life of Jesus: he was conceived of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 1:18; Lk 1:35); at the beginning of his public mission, on the banks of the Jordan, he sees the Holy Spirit descend on him in the form of a dove (cf. Mt 3:16); in this same Spirit Jesus acts, speaks and rejoices (cf. Lk 10:21); and in the Spirit he offers himself up (cf. Heb 9:14). As his mission draws to an end, according to the account of Saint John, Jesus himself clearly relates the giving of his life to the sending of the Spirit upon those who belong to him (cf. Jn 16:7). The Risen Jesus, bearing in his flesh the signs of the passion, then pours out the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:22), making his disciples sharers in his own mission (cf. Jn 20:21). The Holy Spirit was to teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all that Christ had said (cf. Jn 14:26), since he, the Spirit of Truth (cf. Jn 15:26) will guide the disciples into all the truth (cf. Jn 16:13). Finally, in the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the Spirit descended on the Twelve gathered in prayer with Mary on the day of Pentecost (cf. 2:1-4), and impelled them to take up the mission of proclaiming to all peoples the Good News.

The word of God is thus expressed in human words thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit. The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable and constitute a single economy of salvation. The same Spirit who acts in the incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary is the Spirit who guides Jesus throughout his mission and is promised to the disciples. The same Spirit who spoke through the prophets sustains and inspires the Church in her task of proclaiming the word of God and in the preaching of the Apostles; finally, it is this Spirit who inspires the authors of sacred Scripture.

Conscious of this pneumatological horizon, the Synod Fathers highlighted the importance of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of the Church and in the hearts of believers in relation to sacred Scripture: without the efficacious working of the “Spirit of Truth” (Jn 14:16), the words of the Lord cannot be understood. As Saint Irenaeus states: “Those
who do not share in the Spirit do not draw from the bosom of their mother [the Church] the food of life; they receive nothing from the purest fountain that flows from the body of Christ”. Just as the word of God comes to us in the body of Christ, in his Eucharistic body and in the body of the Scriptures, through the working of the Holy Spirit, so too it can only be truly received and understood through that same Spirit.

The great writers of the Christian tradition speak unanimously of the place of the Holy Spirit in the relationship which believers are to have with the Scriptures. Saint John Chrysostom states that Scripture “needs the revelation of the Spirit, so that by discovering the true meaning of the things enclosed therein, we can reap abundant benefits”. Saint Jerome is likewise firmly convinced that “we cannot come to an understanding of Scripture without the assistance of the Holy Spirit who inspired it”. Saint Gregory the Great nicely emphasizes the work of the Spirit in the formation and interpretation of the Bible: “He himself created the words of the holy Testaments, he himself revealed their meaning”. Richard of Saint Victor points out that we need “the eyes of doves”, enlightened and taught by the Spirit, in order to understand the sacred text.

Here too I would like to emphasize the very significant witness to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scripture which we find in the texts of the liturgy, where the word of God is proclaimed, heard and explained to the faithful. We find a witness to this in the ancient prayers which in the form of an epiclesis invoke the Spirit before the proclamation of the readings: “Send your Paraclete Spirit into our hearts and make us understand the Scriptures which he has inspired; and grant that I may interpret them worthily, so that the faithful assembled here may profit thereby”. We also find prayers which, at the end of the homily, again ask God to send the gift of the Spirit upon the faithful: “God our Saviour… we implore you for this people: send upon them the Holy Spirit; may the Lord Jesus come to visit them, speak to the minds of all, dispose their hearts to faith and lead our souls to you, God of mercies”. This makes it clear that we cannot come to understand the meaning of the word unless we are open to the working of the Paraclete in the Church and in the hearts of believers.

_{Tradition and Scripture_}
In reaffirming the profound connection between the Holy Spirit and the word of God, we have also laid the basis for an understanding of the significance and the decisive value of the living Tradition and the sacred Scriptures in the Church. Indeed, since God “so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16), the divine word, spoken in time, is bestowed and “consigned” to the Church in a definitive way, so that the proclamation of salvation can be communicated effectively in every time and place. As the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum reminds us, Jesus Christ himself “commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel — promised beforehand by the prophets, fulfilled in his own person and promulgated by his own lips — to all as the source of all saving truth and moral law, communicating God’s gifts to them. This was faithfully carried out; it was carried out by the Apostles who handed on, by oral preaching, by their example, by their ordinances, what they themselves had received — whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or by coming to know it through the prompting of the Holy Spirit; it was carried out by those Apostles and others associated with them who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing”.[56]

The Second Vatican Council also states that this Tradition of apostolic origin is a living and dynamic reality: it “makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit”; yet not in the sense that it changes in its truth, which is perennial. Rather, “there is a growth in insight into the realities and the words that are being passed on”, through contemplation and study, with the understanding granted by deeper spiritual experience and by the “preaching of those who, on succeeding to the office of bishop, have received the sure charism of truth”.[57]

The living Tradition is essential for enabling the Church to grow through time in the understanding of the truth revealed in the Scriptures; indeed, “by means of the same tradition, the full canon of the sacred books is known to the Church and the holy Scriptures themselves are more thoroughly understood and constantly made effective in the Church”.[58] Ultimately, it is the living Tradition of the Church which makes us adequately understand sacred Scripture as the word of God. Although the word of God precedes and exceeds sacred Scripture, nonetheless Scripture,
as inspired by God, contains the divine word (cf. 2 Tim 3:16) “in an altogether singular way”. [59]

We see clearly, then, how important it is for the People of God to be properly taught and trained to approach the sacred Scriptures in relation to the Church’s living Tradition, and to recognize in them the very word of God. Fostering such an approach in the faithful is very important from the standpoint of the spiritual life. Here it might be helpful to recall the analogy drawn by the Fathers of the Church between the word of God which became “flesh” and the word which became a “book”. [60] The Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum takes up this ancient tradition which holds, as Saint Ambrose says, [61] that “the body of the Son is the Scripture which we have received”, and declares that “the words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech, just as the word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the weak flesh of human beings, became like them”. [62] When understood in this way, sacred Scripture presents itself to us, in the variety of its many forms and content, as a single reality. Indeed, “through all the words of sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single word, his one utterance, in whom he expresses himself completely (cf. Heb 1:1-3)”. [63] Saint Augustine had already made the point clearly: “Remember that one alone is the discourse of God which unfolds in all sacred Scripture, and one alone is the word which resounds on the lips of all the holy writers”. [64]

In short, by the work of the Holy Spirit and under the guidance of the magisterium, the Church hands on to every generation all that has been revealed in Christ. The Church lives in the certainty that her Lord, who spoke in the past, continues today to communicate his word in her living Tradition and in sacred Scripture. Indeed, the word of God is given to us in sacred Scripture as an inspired testimony to revelation; together with the Church’s living Tradition, it constitutes the supreme rule of faith. [65]

*Sacred Scripture, inspiration and truth*

A key concept for understanding the sacred text as the word of God in human words is certainly that of inspiration. Here too we can suggest an analogy: as the word of God became flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, so sacred Scripture is born from the
womb of the Church by the power of the same Spirit. Sacred Scripture is “the word of God set down in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit”. In this way one recognizes the full importance of the human author who wrote the inspired texts and, at the same time, God himself as the true author.

As the Synod Fathers affirmed, the theme of inspiration is clearly decisive for an adequate approach to the Scriptures and their correct interpretation, which for its part is to be done in the same Spirit in whom the sacred texts were written. Whenever our awareness of its inspiration grows weak, we risk reading Scripture as an object of historical curiosity and not as the work of the Holy Spirit in which we can hear the Lord himself speak and recognize his presence in history.

The Synod Fathers also stressed the link between the theme of inspiration and that of the truth of the Scriptures. A deeper study of the process of inspiration will doubtless lead to a greater understanding of the truth contained in the sacred books. As the Council’s teaching states in this regard, the inspired books teach the truth: “since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures. Thus, ‘all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim 3:16-17, Greek).”

Certainly theological reflection has always considered inspiration and truth as two key concepts for an ecclesial hermeneutic of the sacred Scriptures. Nonetheless, one must acknowledge the need today for a fuller and more adequate study of these realities, in order better to respond to the need to interpret the sacred texts in accordance with their nature. Here I would express my fervent hope that research in this field will progress and bear fruit both for biblical science and for the spiritual life of the faithful.

God the Father, source and origin of the word

The economy of revelation has its beginning and origin in God the Father. By his word “the heavens were made, and all their host by the
breath of his mouth” (Ps 33:6). It is he who has given us “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6; cf. Mt 16:17; Lk 9:29).

In the Son, “Logos made flesh” (cf. Jn 1:14), who came to accomplish the will of the one who sent him (cf. Jn 4:34), God, the source of revelation, reveals himself as Father and brings to completion the divine pedagogy which had previously been carried out through the words of the prophets and the wondrous deeds accomplished in creation and in the history of his people and all mankind. The revelation of God the Father culminates in the Son’s gift of the Paraclete (cf. Jn 14:16), the Spirit of the Father and the Son, who guides us “into all the truth” (Jn 16:13).

All God’s promises find their “yes” in Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor 1:20). Men and women are thus enabled to set out on the way that leads to the Father (cf. Jn 14:6), so that in the end “God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor 15:28).

As the cross of Christ demonstrates, God also speaks by his silence. The silence of God, the experience of the distance of the almighty Father, is a decisive stage in the earthly journey of the Son of God, the incarnate Word. Hanging from the wood of the cross, he lamented the suffering caused by that silence: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46). Advancing in obedience to his very last breath, in the obscurity of death, Jesus called upon the Father. He commended himself to him at the moment of passage, through death, to eternal life: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46).

This experience of Jesus reflects the situation of all those who, having heard and acknowledged God’s word, must also confront his silence. This has been the experience of countless saints and mystics, and even today is part of the journey of many believers. God’s silence prolongs his earlier words. In these moments of darkness, he speaks through the mystery of his silence. Hence, in the dynamic of Christian revelation, silence appears as an important expression of the word of God.

Our Response To The God Who Speaks

Called to the covenant with God
By emphasizing the many forms of the word, we have been able to contemplate the number of ways in which God speaks to and encounters men and women, making himself known in dialogue. Certainly, as the Synod Fathers stated, “dialogue, when we are speaking of revelation, entails the primacy of the word of God addressed to man”. The mystery of the Covenant expresses this relationship between God who calls man with his word, and man who responds, albeit making clear that it is not a matter of a meeting of two peers; what we call the Old and New Covenant is not a contract between two equal parties, but a pure gift of God. By this gift of his love God bridges every distance and truly makes us his “partners”, in order to bring about the nuptial mystery of the love between Christ and the Church. In this vision every man and woman appears as someone to whom the word speaks, challenges and calls to enter this dialogue of love through a free response. Each of us is thus enabled by God to hear and respond to his word. We were created in the word and we live in the word; we cannot understand ourselves unless we are open to this dialogue. The word of God discloses the filial and relational nature of human existence. We are indeed called by grace to be conformed to Christ, the Son of the Father, and, in him, to be transformed.

**God hears us and responds to our questions**

In this dialogue with God we come to understand ourselves and we discover an answer to our heart’s deepest questions. The word of God in fact is not inimical to us; it does not stifle our authentic desires, but rather illuminates them, purifies them and brings them to fulfillment. How important it is for our time to discover that God alone responds to the yearning present in the heart of every man and woman! Sad to say, in our days, and in the West, there is a widespread notion that God is extraneous to people’s lives and problems, and that his very presence can be a threat to human autonomy. Yet the entire economy of salvation demonstrates that God speaks and acts in history for our good and our integral salvation. Thus it is decisive, from the pastoral standpoint, to present the word of God in its capacity to enter into dialogue with the everyday problems which people face. Jesus himself says that he came that we might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10). Consequently, we need to make every effort to share the word of God as an openness to our problems, a response to our
questions, a broadening of our values and the fulfillment of our aspirations. The Church's pastoral activity needs to bring out clearly how God listens to our need and our plea for help. As Saint Bonaventure says in the Breviloquium: “The fruit of sacred Scripture is not any fruit whatsoever, but the very fullness of eternal happiness. Sacred Scripture is the book containing the words of eternal life, so that we may not only believe in, but also possess eternal life, in which we will see and love, and all our desires will be fulfilled”.[72]

In dialogue with God through his words

The word of God draws each of us into a conversation with the Lord: the God who speaks teaches us how to speak to him. Here we naturally think of the Book of Psalms, where God gives us words to speak to him, to place our lives before him, and thus to make life itself a path to God.[73] In the Psalms we find expressed every possible human feeling set masterfully in the sight of God; joy and pain, distress and hope, fear and trepidation: here all find expression. Along with the Psalms we think too of the many other passages of sacred Scripture which express our turning to God in intercessory prayer (cf. Ex 33:12-16), in exultant songs of victory (cf. Ex 15) or in sorrow at the difficulties experienced in carrying out our mission (cf. Jer 20:7-18). In this way our word to God becomes God’s word, thus confirming the dialogical nature of all Christian revelation,[74] and our whole existence becomes a dialogue with the God who speaks and listens, who calls us and gives direction to our lives. Here the word of God reveals that our entire life is under the divine call.[75]

The word of God and faith

“The obedience of faith’ (Rom 16:26; cf. Rom 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) must be our response to God who reveals. By faith one freely commits oneself entirely to God, making ‘the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals’ and willingly assenting to the revelation given by God”. [76] In these words the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum gave precise expression to the stance which we must have with regard to God. The proper human response to the God who speaks is faith. Here we see clearly that “in order to accept revelation, man must open his mind and heart to the working of the Holy Spirit who enables him to understand the word of God present in
the sacred Scriptures”. It is the preaching of the divine word, in fact, which gives rise to faith, whereby we give our heartfelt assent to the truth which has been revealed to us and we commit ourselves entirely to Christ: “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). The whole history of salvation progressively demonstrates this profound bond between the word of God and the faith which arises from an encounter with Christ. Faith thus takes shape as an encounter with a person to whom we entrust our whole life. Christ Jesus remains present today in history, in his body which is the Church; for this reason our act of faith is at once both personal and ecclesial.

**Sin as a refusal to hear the word of God**

The word of God also inevitably reveals the tragic possibility that human freedom can withdraw from this covenant dialogue with God for which we were created. The divine word also discloses the sin that lurks in the human heart. Quite frequently in both the Old and in the New Testament, we find sin described as a refusal to hear the word, as a breaking of the covenant and thus as being closed to God who calls us to communion with himself. Sacred Scripture shows how man’s sin is essentially disobedience and refusal to hear. The radical obedience of Jesus even to his death on the cross (cf. Phil 2:8) completely unmasks this sin. His obedience brings about the New Covenant between God and man, and grants us the possibility of reconciliation. Jesus was sent by the Father as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins and for those of the whole world (cf. 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10; Heb 7:27). We are thus offered the merciful possibility of redemption and the start of a new life in Christ. For this reason it is important that the faithful be taught to acknowledge that the root of sin lies in the refusal to hear the word of the Lord, and to accept in Jesus, the Word of God, the forgiveness which opens us to salvation.

**Mary, “Mother of God’s Word” and “Mother of Faith”**

The Synod Fathers declared that the basic aim of the Twelfth Assembly was “to renew the Church’s faith in the word of God”. To do so, we need to look to the one in whom the interplay between the word of God and faith was brought to perfection, that is, to the Virgin Mary, “who by her ‘yes’ to the word of the covenant and her mission, perfectly fulfills
the divine vocation of humanity”. The human reality created through
the word finds its most perfect image in Mary’s obedient faith. From the
Annunciation to Pentecost she appears as a woman completely open to the
will of God. She is the Immaculate Conception, the one whom God made
“full of grace” (cf. Lk 1:28) and unconditionally docile to his word (cf. Lk
1:38). Her obedient faith shapes her life at every moment before God’s
plan. A Virgin ever attentive to God’s word, she lives completely attuned to
that word; she treasures in her heart the events of her Son, piecing them
together as if in a single mosaic (cf. Lk 2:19,51).

In our day the faithful need to be helped to see more clearly the link
between Mary of Nazareth and the faith-filled hearing of God’s word. I
would encourage scholars as well to study the relationship between
Mariology and the theology of the word. This could prove most beneficial
both for the spiritual life and for theological and biblical studies. Indeed,
what the understanding of the faith has enabled us to know about Mary
stands at the heart of Christian truth. The incarnation of the word cannot
be conceived apart from the freedom of this young woman who by her
assent decisively cooperated with the entrance of the eternal into time.
Mary is the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the word of God,
which took flesh in her. Mary also symbolizes openness to God and others;
an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the
word becomes a way of life.

Here I would like to mention Mary’s familiarity with the word of God.
This is clearly evident in the Magnificat. There we see in some sense how
she identifies with the word, enters into it; in this marvellous canticle of
faith, the Virgin sings the praises of the Lord in his own words: “The
Magnificat — a portrait, so to speak, of her soul — is entirely woven from
threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the word of God. Here we
see how completely at home Mary is with the word of God, with ease she
moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the word of God; the
word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of
God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God,
how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued
with the word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word
Incarnate”.[81]
Furthermore, in looking to the Mother of God, we see how God’s activity in the world always engages our freedom, because through faith the divine word transforms us. Our apostolic and pastoral work can never be effective unless we learn from Mary how to be shaped by the working of God within us: “devout and loving attention to the figure of Mary as the model and archetype of the Church’s faith is of capital importance for bringing about in our day a concrete paradigm shift in the Church’s relation with the word, both in prayerful listening and in generous commitment to mission and proclamation”.[82]

As we contemplate in the Mother of God a life totally shaped by the word, we realize that we too are called to enter into the mystery of faith, whereby Christ comes to dwell in our lives. Every Christian believer, Saint Ambrose reminds us, in some way interiorly conceives and gives birth to the word of God: even though there is only one Mother of Christ in the flesh, in the faith Christ is the progeny of us all.[83] Thus, what took place for Mary can daily take place in each of us, in the hearing of the word and in the celebration of the sacraments.

**The Interpretation Of Sacred Scripture**

**In The Church**

*The Church as the primary setting for biblical hermeneutics*

Another major theme that emerged during the Synod, to which I would now like to draw attention, is the interpretation of sacred Scripture in the Church. The intrinsic link between the word and faith makes clear that authentic biblical hermeneutics can only be had within the faith of the Church, which has its paradigm in Mary’s fiat. Saint Bonaventure states that without faith there is no key to throw open the sacred text: “This is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, from whom, as from a fountain, flow forth the certainty and the understanding of all sacred Scripture. Therefore it is impossible for anyone to attain to knowledge of that truth unless he first have infused faith in Christ, which is the lamp, the gate and the foundation of all Scripture”.[84] And Saint Thomas Aquinas, citing Saint Augustine, insists that “the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the inward grace of healing faith”. [85]
Here we can point to a fundamental criterion of biblical hermeneutics: the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church. This is not to uphold the ecclesial context as an extrinsic rule to which exegetes must submit, but rather is something demanded by the very nature of the Scriptures and the way they gradually came into being. “Faith traditions formed the living context for the literary activity of the authors of sacred Scripture. Their insertion into this context also involved a sharing in both the liturgical and external life of the communities, in their intellectual world, in their culture and in the ups and downs of their shared history. In like manner, the interpretation of sacred Scripture requires full participation on the part of exegetes in the life and faith of the believing community of their own time.”

Consequently, “since sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit through whom it was written”, exegetes, theologians and the whole people of God must approach it as what it really is, the word of God conveyed to us through human words (cf. 1 Thess 2:13). This is a constant datum implicit in the Bible itself: “No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:20-21). Moreover, it is the faith of the Church that recognizes in the Bible the word of God; as Saint Augustine memorably put it: “I would not believe the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church led me to do so”. The Holy Spirit, who gives life to the Church, enables us to interpret the Scriptures authoritatively. The Bible is the Church’s book, and its essential place in the Church’s life gives rise to its genuine interpretation.

Saint Jerome recalls that we can never read Scripture simply on our own. We come up against too many closed doors and we slip too easily into error. The Bible was written by the People of God for the People of God, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Only in this communion with the People of God can we truly enter as a “we” into the heart of the truth that God himself wishes to convey to us. Jerome, for whom “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”, states that the ecclesial dimension of biblical interpretation is not a requirement imposed from without: the Book is the very voice of the pilgrim People of God, and only within the
faith of this People are we, so to speak, attuned to understand sacred Scripture. An authentic interpretation of the Bible must always be in harmony with the faith of the Catholic Church. He thus wrote to a priest: “Remain firmly attached to the traditional doctrine that you have been taught, so that you may exhort according to sound doctrine and confound those who contradict it”.[91]

Approaches to the sacred text that prescind from faith might suggest interesting elements on the level of textual structure and form, but would inevitably prove merely preliminary and structurally incomplete efforts. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission, echoing an accepted principle of modern hermeneutics, has stated: “access to a proper understanding of biblical texts is only granted to the person who has an affinity with what the text is saying on the basis of life experience”. All this brings out more clearly the relationship between the spiritual life and scriptural hermeneutics. “As the reader matures in the life of the Spirit, so there grows also his or her capacity to understand the realities of which the Bible speaks”. The intensity of an authentic ecclesial experience can only lead to the growth of genuine understanding in faith where the Scriptures are concerned; conversely, reading the Scriptures in faith leads to growth in ecclesial life itself. Here we can see once again the truth of the celebrated dictum of Saint Gregory the Great: “The divine words grow together with the one who reads them”. Listening to the word of God introduces and increases ecclesial communion with all those who walk by faith.

“The soul of sacred theology”

“The study of the sacred page should be, as it were, the very soul of theology”: this quotation from the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum has become increasingly familiar over the years. Theological and exegetical scholarship, in the period after the Second Vatican Council, made frequent reference to this expression as symbolic of the renewed interest in sacred Scripture. The Twelfth Assembly of the Synod of Bishops also frequently alluded to this well-known phrase in order to express the relationship between historical research and a hermeneutic of faith where the sacred text is concerned. The Fathers acknowledged with joy that study of the word of God in the Church has grown in recent decades, and they expressed heartfelt gratitude to the many exegetes and theologians who
with dedication, commitment and competence continue to make an essential contribution to the deeper understanding of the meaning of the Scriptures, as they address the complex issues facing biblical studies in our day. Sincere gratitude was also expressed to the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, past and present, who in close collaboration with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith continue to offer their expertise in the examination of particular questions raised by the study of sacred Scripture. The Synod likewise felt a need to look into the present state of biblical studies and their standing within the field of theology. The pastoral effectiveness of the Church’s activity and the spiritual life of the faithful depend to a great extent on the fruitfulness of the relationship between exegesis and theology. For this reason, I consider it important to take up some reflections that emerged in the discussion of this topic during the Synod sessions.

**The development of biblical studies and the Church’s magisterium**

Before all else, we need to acknowledge the benefits that historical-critical exegesis and other recently-developed methods of textual analysis have brought to the life of the Church. For the Catholic understanding of sacred Scripture, attention to such methods is indispensable, linked as it is to the realism of the Incarnation: “This necessity is a consequence of the Christian principle formulated in the Gospel of John 1:14: *Verbum caro factum est*. The historical fact is a constitutive dimension of the Christian faith. The history of salvation is not mythology, but a true history, and it should thus be studied with the methods of serious historical research”. The study of the Bible requires a knowledge of these methods of enquiry and their suitable application. While it is true that scholarship has come to a much greater appreciation of their importance in the modern period, albeit not everywhere to the same degree, nonetheless the sound ecclesial tradition has always demonstrated a love for the study of the “letter”. Here we need but recall the monastic culture which is the ultimate foundation of European culture; at its root lies a concern for the word. The desire for God includes love for the word in all its dimensions: “because in the word of the Bible God comes to us and we to him, we must learn to penetrate the secret of language, to understand it in its structure and its mode of
expression. Thus, because of the search for God, the secular sciences which lead to a greater understanding of language became important.\[99\]

The Church’s living magisterium, which is charged with “giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition”,\[100\] intervened in a prudent and balanced way regarding the correct response to the introduction of new methods of historical analysis. I think in particular of the Encyclicals Providentissimus Deus of Pope Leo XIII and Divino Afflante Spiritu of Pope Pius XII. My venerable predecessor John Paul II recalled the importance of these documents on the centenary and the fiftieth anniversary respectively of their promulgation.\[101\] Pope Leo XIII’s intervention had the merit of protecting the Catholic interpretation of the Bible from the inroads of rationalism, without, however, seeking refuge in a spiritual meaning detached from history. Far from shunning scientific criticism, the Church was wary only of “preconceived opinions that claim to be based on science, but which in reality surreptitiously cause science to depart from its domain”.\[102\] Pope Pius XII, on the other hand, was faced with attacks on the part of those who proposed a so-called mystical exegesis which rejected any form of scientific approach. The Encyclical Divino Afflante Spiritu was careful to avoid any hint of a dichotomy between “scientific exegesis” for use in apologetics and “spiritual interpretation meant for internal use”; rather it affirmed both the “theological significance of the literal sense, methodically defined” and the fact that “determining the spiritual sense … belongs itself to the realm of exegetical science”.\[103\] In this way, both documents rejected “a split between the human and the divine, between scientific research and respect for the faith, between the literal sense and the spiritual sense”.\[104\] This balance was subsequently maintained by the 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: “in their work of interpretation, Catholic exegetes must never forget that what they are interpreting is the word of God. Their common task is not finished when they have simply determined sources, defined forms or explained literary procedures. They arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God’s word for today”.\[105\]

*The Council’s biblical hermeneutic: a directive to be appropriated*

Against this background, one can better appreciate the great principles
of interpretation proper to Catholic exegesis set forth by the Second Vatican Council, especially in the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum: “Seeing that, in sacred Scripture, God speaks through human beings in human fashion, it follows that the interpreters of sacred Scripture, if they are to ascertain what God has wished to communicate to us, should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words”.[106] On the one hand, the Council emphasizes the study of literary genres and historical context as basic elements for understanding the meaning intended by the sacred author. On the other hand, since Scripture must be interpreted in the same Spirit in which it was written, the Dogmatic Constitution indicates three fundamental criteria for an appreciation of the divine dimension of the Bible: 1) the text must be interpreted with attention to the unity of the whole of Scripture; nowadays this is called canonical exegesis; 2) account is be taken of the living Tradition of the whole Church; and, finally, 3) respect must be shown for the analogy of faith. “Only where both methodological levels, the historical-critical and the theological, are respected, can one speak of a theological exegesis, an exegesis worthy of this book”.[107]

The Synod Fathers rightly stated that the positive fruit yielded by the use of modern historical-critical research is undeniable. While today’s academic exegesis, including that of Catholic scholars, is highly competent in the field of historical-critical methodology and its latest developments, it must be said that comparable attention need to be paid to the theological dimension of the biblical texts, so that they can be more deeply understood in accordance with the three elements indicated by the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum.[108]

The danger of dualism and a secularized hermeneutic

In this regard we should mention the serious risk nowadays of a dualistic approach to sacred Scripture. To distinguish two levels of approach to the Bible does not in any way mean to separate or oppose them, nor simply to juxtapose them. They exist only in reciprocity. Unfortunately, a sterile separation sometimes creates a barrier between exegesis and theology, and this “occurs even at the highest academic
levels”. Here I would mention the most troubling consequences, which are to be avoided.

a) First and foremost, if the work of exegesis is restricted to the first level alone, Scripture ends up being a text belonging only to the past: “One can draw moral consequences from it, one can learn history, but the Book as such speaks only of the past, and exegesis is no longer truly theological, but becomes pure historiography, history of literature”. Clearly, such a reductive approach can never make it possible to comprehend the event of God’s revelation through his word, which is handed down to us in the living Tradition and in Scripture.

b) The lack of a hermeneutic of faith with regard to Scripture entails more than a simple absence; in its place there inevitably enters another hermeneutic, a positivistic and secularized hermeneutic ultimately based on the conviction that the Divine does not intervene in human history. According to this hermeneutic, whenever a divine element seems present, it has to be explained in some other way, reducing everything to the human element. This leads to interpretations that deny the historicity of the divine elements.

c) Such a position can only prove harmful to the life of the Church, casting doubt over fundamental mysteries of Christianity and their historicity — as, for example, the institution of the Eucharist and the resurrection of Christ. A philosophical hermeneutic is thus imposed, one which denies the possibility that the Divine can enter and be present within history. The adoption of this hermeneutic within theological studies inevitably introduces a sharp dichotomy between an exegesis limited solely to the first level and a theology tending towards a spiritualization of the meaning of the Scriptures, one which would fail to respect the historical character of revelation.

All this is also bound to have a negative impact on the spiritual life and on pastoral activity; “as a consequence of the absence of the second methodological level, a profound gulf is opened up between scientific exegesis and lectio divina. This can give rise to a lack of clarity in the preparation of homilies”. It must also be said that this dichotomy can create confusion and a lack of stability in the intellectual formation of
candidates for ecclesial ministries.\footnote{113} In a word, “where exegesis is not theology, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology, and conversely, where theology is not essentially the interpretation of the Church’s Scripture, such a theology no longer has a foundation”.\footnote{114} Hence we need to take a more careful look at the indications provided by the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum in this regard.

\textbf{Faith and reason in the approach to Scripture}

I believe that what Pope John Paul II wrote about this question in his Encyclical \textit{Fides et Ratio} can lead to a fuller understanding of exegesis and its relationship to the whole of theology. He stated that we should not underestimate “the danger inherent in seeking to derive the truth of sacred Scripture from the use of one method alone, ignoring the need for a more comprehensive exegesis which enables the exegete, together with the whole Church, to arrive at the full sense of the texts. Those who devote themselves to the study of sacred Scripture should always remember that the various hermeneutical approaches have their own philosophical underpinnings, which need to be carefully evaluated before they are applied to the sacred texts”\footnote{115}

This far-sighted reflection enables us to see how a hermeneutical approach to sacred Scripture inevitably brings into play the proper relationship between faith and reason. Indeed, the secularized hermeneutic of sacred Scripture is the product of reason’s attempt structurally to exclude any possibility that God might enter into our lives and speak to us in human words. Here too, we need to urge a broadening of the scope of reason.\footnote{116} In applying methods of historical analysis, no criteria should be adopted which would rule out in advance God’s self-disclosure in human history. The unity of the two levels at work in the interpretation of sacred Scripture presupposes, in a word, the harmony of faith and reason. On the one hand, it calls for a faith which, by maintaining a proper relationship with right reason, never degenerates into fideism, which in the case of Scripture would end up in fundamentalism. On the other hand, it calls for a reason which, in its investigation of the historical elements present in the Bible, is marked by openness and does not reject \emph{a priori} anything beyond its own terms of reference. In any case, the religion of the incarnate Logos can hardly fail to appear profoundly reasonable to anyone who sincerely
seeks the truth and the ultimate meaning of his or her own life and history.

**Literal sense and spiritual sense**

A significant contribution to the recovery of an adequate scriptural hermeneutic, as the synodal assembly stated, can also come from renewed attention to the Fathers of the Church and their exegetical approach. The Church Fathers present a theology that still has great value today because at its heart is the study of sacred Scripture as a whole. Indeed, the Fathers are primarily and essentially “commentators on sacred Scripture”. Their example can “teach modern exegetes a truly religious approach to sacred Scripture, and likewise an interpretation that is constantly attuned to the criterion of communion with the experience of the Church, which journeys through history under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”.

While obviously lacking the philological and historical resources at the disposal of modern exegesis, the patristic and mediaeval tradition could recognize the different senses of Scripture, beginning with the literal sense, namely, “the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation”. Saint Thomas of Aquinas, for example, states that “all the senses of sacred Scripture are based on the literal sense”. It is necessary, however, to remember that in patristic and medieval times every form of exegesis, including the literal form, was carried out on the basis of faith, without there necessarily being any distinction between the literal sense and the spiritual sense. One may mention in this regard the medieval couplet which expresses the relationship between the different senses of Scripture:

“Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,

Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.

The letter speaks of deeds; allegory about the faith;

The moral about our actions; anagogy about our destiny”.

Here we can note the unity and interrelation between the literal sense and the spiritual sense, which for its part is subdivided into three senses which deal with the contents of the faith, with the moral life and with our eschatological aspiration.
In a word, while acknowledging the validity and necessity, as well as the limits, of the historical-critical method, we learn from the Fathers that exegesis “is truly faithful to the proper intention of biblical texts when it goes not only to the heart of their formulation to find the reality of faith there expressed, but also seeks to link this reality to the experience of faith in our present world”.[123] Only against this horizon can we recognize that the word of God is living and addressed to each of us in the here and now of our lives. In this sense, the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s definition of the spiritual sense, as understood by Christian faith, remains fully valid: it is “the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it. This context truly exists. In it the New Testament recognizes the fulfillment of the Scriptures. It is therefore quite acceptable to re-read the Scriptures in the light of this new context, which is that of life in the Spirit”.[124]

The need to transcend the “letter”

In rediscovering the interplay between the different senses of Scripture it thus becomes essential to grasp the passage from letter to spirit. This is not an automatic, spontaneous passage; rather, the letter needs to be transcended: “the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text. To attain to it involves a progression and a process of understanding guided by the inner movement of the whole corpus, and hence it also has to become a vital process”.[125] Here we see the reason why an authentic process of interpretation is never purely an intellectual process but also a lived one, demanding full engagement in the life of the Church, which is life “according to the Spirit” (Gal 5:16). The criteria set forth in Number 12 of the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum thus become clearer: this progression cannot take place with regard to an individual literary fragment unless it is seen in relation to the whole of Scripture. Indeed, the goal to which we are necessarily progressing is the one Word. There is an inner drama in this process, since the passage that takes place in the power of the Spirit inevitably engages each person’s freedom. Saint Paul lived this passage to the full in his own life. In his words: “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6), he expressed in radical terms the significance of this process of transcending the letter and coming to understand it only
in terms of the whole. Paul discovered that “the Spirit of freedom has a name, and hence that freedom has an inner criterion: ‘The Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (2 Cor 3:17). The Spirit of freedom is not simply the exegete’s own idea, the exegete’s own vision. The Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the Lord who shows us the way”.[126] We know that for Saint Augustine too this passage was at once dramatic and liberating; he came to believe the Scriptures — which at first sight struck him as so disjointed in themselves and in places so coarse — through the very process of transcending the letter which he learned from Saint Ambrose in typological interpretation, wherein the entire Old Testament is a path to Jesus Christ. For Saint Augustine, transcending the literal sense made the letter itself credible, and enabled him to find at last the answer to his deep inner restlessness and his thirst for truth.[127]

The Bible’s intrinsic unity

In the passage from letter to spirit, we also learn, within the Church’s great tradition, to see the unity of all Scripture, grounded in the unity of God’s word, which challenges our life and constantly calls us to conversion.[128] Here the words of Hugh of Saint Victor remain a sure guide: “All divine Scripture is one book, and this one book is Christ, speaks of Christ and finds its fulfillment in Christ”. [129] Viewed in purely historical or literary terms, of course, the Bible is not a single book, but a collection of literary texts composed over the course of a thousand years or more, and its individual books are not easily seen to possess an interior unity; instead, we see clear inconsistencies between them. This was already the case with the Bible of Israel, which we Christians call the Old Testament. It is all the more so when, as Christians, we relate the New Testament and its writings as a kind of hermeneutical key to Israel’s Bible, thus interpreting the latter as a path to Christ. The New Testament generally does not employ the term “Scripture” (cf. Rom 4:3; 1 Pet 2:6), but rather “the Scriptures” (cf. Mt 21:43; Jn 5:39; Rom 1:2; 2 Pet 3:16), which nonetheless are seen in their entirety as the one word of God addressed to us.[130] This makes it clear that the person of Christ gives unity to all the “Scriptures” in relation to the one “Word”. In this way we can understand the words of Number 12 of the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum, which
point to the internal unity of the entire Bible as a decisive criterion for a correct hermeneutic of faith. 

*The relationship between the Old and the New Testaments*

Against this backdrop of the unity of the Scriptures in Christ, theologians and pastors alike need to be conscious of the relationship between Old and the New Testaments. First of all, it is evident that the New Testament itself acknowledges the Old Testament as the word of God and thus accepts the authority of the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people.\(^{[131]}\) It implicitly acknowledges them by using the same language and by frequently referring to passages from these Scriptures. It explicitly acknowledges them by citing many parts of them as a basis for argument. In the New Testament, an argument based on texts from the Old Testament thus has a definitive quality, superior to that of mere human argumentation. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus states that “Scripture cannot be rejected” (*Jn* 10:35) and Saint Paul specifically makes clear that the Old Testament revelation remains valid for us Christians (cf. *Rom* 15:4; *1 Cor* 10:11).\(^{[132]}\) We also affirm that “Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and the Holy Land is the motherland of the Church”:\(^{[133]}\) the roots of Christianity are found in the Old Testament, and Christianity continually draws nourishment from these roots. Consequently, sound Christian doctrine has always resisted all new forms of Marcionism, which tend, in different ways, to set the Old Testament in opposition to the New.\(^{[134]}\)

Moreover, the New Testament itself claims to be consistent with the Old and proclaims that in the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Christ the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people have found their perfect fulfillment. It must be observed, however, that the concept of the fulfillment of the Scriptures is a complex one, since it has three dimensions: a basic aspect of continuity with the Old Testament revelation, an aspect of discontinuity and an aspect of fulfillment and transcendence. The mystery of Christ stands in continuity of intent with the sacrificial cult of the Old Testament, but it came to pass in a very different way, corresponding to a number of prophetic statements and thus reaching a perfection never previously obtained. The Old Testament is itself replete with tensions between its institutional and its prophetic aspects. The paschal mystery of Christ is in complete conformity — albeit in a way that
could not have been anticipated — with the prophecies and the foreshadowings of the Scriptures; yet it presents clear aspects of discontinuity with regard to the institutions of the Old Testament.

These considerations show the unique importance of the Old Testament for Christians, while at the same time bringing out the newness of Christological interpretation. From apostolic times and in her living Tradition, the Church has stressed the unity of God’s plan in the two Testaments through the use of typology; this procedure is in no way arbitrary, but is intrinsic to the events related in the sacred text and thus involves the whole of Scripture. Typology “discerns in God’s works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son”.[135] Christians, then, read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. While typological interpretation manifests the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament from the standpoint of the New, we must not forget that the Old Testament retains its own inherent value as revelation, as our Lord himself reaffirmed (cf. *Mk* 12:29-31). Consequently, “the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament (cf. *1 Cor* 5:6-8; *1 Cor* 10:1-11)”.[136] For this reason the Synod Fathers stated that “the Jewish understanding of the Bible can prove helpful to Christians for their own understanding and study of the Scriptures”.[137]

“The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old is made manifest in the New”,[138] as Saint Augustine perceptively noted. It is important, therefore, that in both pastoral and academic settings the close relationship between the two Testaments be clearly brought out, in keeping with the dictum of Saint Gregory the Great that “what the Old Testament promised, the New Testament made visible; what the former announces in a hidden way, the latter openly proclaims as present. Therefore the Old Testament is a prophecy of the New Testament; and the best commentary on the Old Testament is the New Testament”.[139]

*The “dark” passages of the Bible*

In discussing the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, the Synod also considered those passages in the Bible which,
due to the violence and immorality they occasionally contain, prove obscure and difficult. Here it must be remembered first and foremost that biblical revelation is deeply rooted in history. God’s plan is manifested progressively and it is accomplished slowly, in successive stages and despite human resistance. God chose a people and patiently worked to guide and educate them. Revelation is suited to the cultural and moral level of distant times and thus describes facts and customs, such as cheating and trickery, and acts of violence and massacre, without explicitly denouncing the immorality of such things. This can be explained by the historical context, yet it can cause the modern reader to be taken aback, especially if he or she fails to take account of the many “dark” deeds carried out down the centuries, and also in our own day. In the Old Testament, the preaching of the prophets vigorously challenged every kind of injustice and violence, whether collective or individual, and thus became God’s way of training his people in preparation for the Gospel. So it would be a mistake to neglect those passages of Scripture that strike us as problematic. Rather, we should be aware that the correct interpretation of these passages requires a degree of expertise, acquired through a training that interprets the texts in their historical-literary context and within the Christian perspective which has as its ultimate hermeneutical key “the Gospel and the new commandment of Jesus Christ brought about in the paschal mystery”. I encourage scholars and pastors to help all the faithful to approach these passages through an interpretation which enables their meaning to emerge in the light of the mystery of Christ.

*Christians, Jews and the sacred Scriptures*

Having considered the close relationship between the New Testament and the Old, we now naturally turn to the special bond which that relationship has engendered between Christians and Jews, a bond that must never be overlooked. Pope John Paul II, speaking to Jews, called them “our ‘beloved brothers’ in the faith of Abraham, our Patriarch”. To acknowledge this fact is in no way to disregard the instances of discontinuity which the New Testament asserts with regard to the institutions of the Old Testament, much less the fulfillment of the Scriptures in the mystery of Jesus Christ, acknowledged as Messiah and Son of God. All the same, this profound and radical difference by no
means implies mutual hostility. The example of Saint Paul (cf. Rom 9-11) shows on the contrary that “an attitude of respect, esteem and love for the Jewish people is the only truly Christian attitude in the present situation, which is a mysterious part of God’s wholly positive plan.”[142] Indeed, Saint Paul says of the Jews that: “as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers, for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable!” (Rom 11:28-29).

Saint Paul also uses the lovely image of the olive tree to describe the very close relationship between Christians and Jews: the Church of the Gentiles is like a wild olive shoot, grafted onto the good olive tree that is the people of the Covenant (cf. Rom 11:17-24). In other words, we draw our nourishment from the same spiritual roots. We encounter one another as brothers and sisters who at certain moments in their history have had a tense relationship, but are now firmly committed to building bridges of lasting friendship.[143] As Pope John Paul II said on another occasion: “We have much in common. Together we can do much for peace, justice and for a more fraternal and more humane world”. [144]

I wish to state once more how much the Church values her dialogue with the Jews. Wherever it seems appropriate, it would be good to create opportunities for encounter and exchange in public as well as in private, and thus to promote growth in reciprocal knowledge, in mutual esteem and cooperation, also in the study of the sacred Scriptures.

*The fundamentalist interpretation of sacred Scripture*

The attention we have been paying to different aspects of the theme of biblical hermeneutics now enables us to consider a subject which came up a number of times during the Synod: that of the fundamentalist interpretation of sacred Scripture.[145] The Pontifical Biblical Commission, in its document The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, has laid down some important guidelines. Here I would like especially to deal with approaches which fail to respect the authenticity of the sacred text, but promote subjective and arbitrary interpretations. The “literalism” championed by the fundamentalist approach actually represents a betrayal of both the literal and the spiritual sense, and opens the way to various forms of manipulation, as, for example, by disseminating anti-ecclesial
interpretations of the Scriptures. “The basic problem with fundamentalist interpretation is that, refusing to take into account the historical character of biblical revelation, it makes itself incapable of accepting the full truth of the incarnation itself. As regards relationships with God, fundamentalism seeks to escape any closeness of the divine and the human … for this reason, it tends to treat the biblical text as if it had been dictated word for word by the Spirit. It fails to recognize that the word of God has been formulated in language and expression conditioned by various periods”.

Christianity, on the other hand, perceives in the words the Word himself, the Logos who displays his mystery through this complexity and the reality of human history. The true response to a fundamentalist approach is “the faith-filled interpretation of sacred Scripture”. This manner of interpretation, “practiced from antiquity within the Church’s Tradition, seeks saving truth for the life of the individual Christian and for the Church. It recognizes the historical value of the biblical tradition. Precisely because of the tradition’s value as an historical witness, this reading seeks to discover the living meaning of the sacred Scriptures for the lives of believers today”, while not ignoring the human mediation of the inspired text and its literary genres.

**Dialogue between pastors, theologians and exegetes**

An authentic hermeneutic of faith has several important consequences for the Church’s pastoral activity. The Synod Fathers themselves recommended, for example, a closer working relationship between pastors, exegetes and theologians. Episcopal Conferences might foster such encounters with the “aim of promoting greater communion in the service of the word of God”. Cooperation of this sort will help all to carry out their work more effectively for the benefit of the whole Church. For scholars too, this pastoral orientation involves approaching the sacred text with the realization that it is a message which the Lord addresses to us for our salvation. In the words of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, “Catholic exegetes and other workers in the field of sacred theology should work diligently with one another and under the watchful eye of the sacred magisterium. Using appropriate techniques, they should together set about examining and explaining the sacred texts in such a way that as many as possible of those who are ministers of God’s word may be able to dispense
fruitfully the nourishment of the Scriptures to the people of God. This nourishment enlightens the mind, strengthens the will and fires the hearts of men and women with the love of God”.[150]

The Bible and ecumenism

Conscious that the Church has her foundation in Christ, the incarnate Word of God, the Synod wished to emphasize the centrality of biblical studies within ecumenical dialogue aimed at the full expression of the unity of all believers in Christ.[151] The Scriptures themselves contain Jesus’ moving prayer to the Father that his disciples might be one, so that the world may believe (cf. Jn 17:21). All this can only strengthen our conviction that by listening and meditating together on the Scriptures, we experience a real, albeit not yet full communion;[152] “shared listening to the Scriptures thus spurs us on towards the dialogue of charity and enables growth in the dialogue of truth”.[153] Listening together to the word of God, engaging in biblical lectio divina, letting ourselves be struck by the inexhaustible freshness of God’s word which never grows old, overcoming our deafness to those words that do not fit our own opinions or prejudices, listening and studying within the communion of the believers of every age: all these things represent a way of coming to unity in faith as a response to hearing the word of God.[154] The words of the Second Vatican Council were clear in this regard: “in [ecumenical] dialogue itself, sacred Scripture is a precious instrument in the mighty hand of God for attaining to that unity which the Saviour holds out to all”. [155] Consequently, there should be an increase in ecumenical study, discussion and celebrations of the word of God, with due respect for existing norms and the variety of traditions.[156] These celebrations advance the cause of ecumenism and, when suitably carried out, they represent intense moments of authentic prayer asking God to hasten the day when we will all be able at last to sit at the one table and drink from the one cup. Nonetheless, while it is praiseworthy and right to promote such services, care must be taken that they are not proposed to the faithful as alternatives to the celebration of Holy Mass on Sundays or holydays of obligation.

In this work of study and prayer, we serenely acknowledge those aspects which still need to be explored more deeply and those on which we
still differ, such as the understanding of the authoritative subject of interpretation in the Church and the decisive role of the magisterium.\[157\]

Finally, I wish to emphasize the statements of the Synod Fathers about the ecumenical importance of translations of the Bible in the various languages. We know that translating a text is no mere mechanical task, but belongs in some sense to the work of interpretation. In this regard, the Venerable John Paul II observed that “anyone who recalls how heavily debates about Scripture influenced divisions, especially in the West, can appreciate the significant step forward which these common translations represent”.\[158\] Promoting common translations of the Bible is part of the ecumenical enterprise. I would like to thank all those engaged in this important work, and I encourage them to persevere in their efforts.

**Consequences for the study of theology**

A further consequence of an adequate hermeneutic of faith has to do with its necessary implications for exegetical and theological formation, particularly that of candidates for the priesthood. Care must be taken to ensure that the study of sacred Scripture is truly the soul of theology inasmuch as it is acknowledged as the word of God addressed to today’s world, to the Church and to each of us personally. It is important that the criteria indicated in Number 12 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* receive real attention and become the object of deeper study. A notion of scholarly research that would consider itself neutral with regard to Scripture should not be encouraged. As well as learning the original languages in which the Bible was written and suitable methods of interpretation, students need to have a deep spiritual life, in order to appreciate that the Scripture can only be understood if it is lived.

Along these lines, I urge that the study of the word of God, both handed down and written, be constantly carried out in a profoundly ecclesial spirit, and that academic formation take due account of the pertinent interventions of the magisterium, which “is not superior to the word of God, but is rather its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devoutly, guards it reverently and expounds it faithfully”.\[159\] Care must thus be taken that the instruction imparted
acknowledge that “sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others”. It is my hope that, in fidelity to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the study of sacred Scripture, read within the communion of the universal Church, will truly be the soul of theological studies.

The saints and the interpretation of Scripture

The interpretation of sacred Scripture would remain incomplete were it not to include listening to those who have truly lived the word of God: namely, the saints. Indeed, “viva lectio est vita bonorum”. The most profound interpretation of Scripture comes precisely from those who let themselves be shaped by the word of God through listening, reading and assiduous meditation.

It is certainly not by chance that the great currents of spirituality in the Church’s history originated with an explicit reference to Scripture. I am thinking for example of Saint Anthony the Abbot, who was moved by hearing Christ’s words: “if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). No less striking is the question posed by Saint Basil the Great in the Moralia: “What is the distinctive mark of faith? Full and unhesitating certainty that the words inspired by God are true … What is the distinctive mark of the faithful? Conforming their lives with the same complete certainty to the meaning of the words of Scripture, not daring to remove or add a single thing”. Saint Benedict, in his Rule, refers to Scripture as “a most perfect norm for human life”. Saint Francis of Assisi — we learn from Thomas of Celano — “upon hearing that the disciples of Christ must possess neither gold, nor silver nor money, nor carry a bag, nor bread, nor a staff for the journey, nor sandals nor two tunics … exulting in the Holy Spirit, immediately cried out: “This is what I want, this is what I ask for, this I long to do with all my heart!” Saint Clare of Assisi shared fully in the experience of Saint Francis: “The form of life of the Order of Poor Sisters — she writes — is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”. So too, Saint Dominic “everywhere showed himself to be a man of the Gospel, in word as in deed” and wanted his friars likewise to be “men of the Gospel”. The Carmelite
Saint Teresa of Avila, who in her writings constantly uses biblical images to explain her mystical experiences, says that Jesus himself revealed to her that “all the evil in the world is derived from not knowing clearly the truths of sacred Scripture”.[171] Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus discovered that love was her personal vocation by poring over the Scriptures, especially Chapters 12 and 13 of the First Letter to the Corinthians;[172] the same saint describes the attraction of the Scriptures: “No sooner do I glance at the Gospel, but immediately I breathe in the fragrance of the life of Jesus and I know where to run”.[173] Every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God: we can think of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in his search for truth and in his discernment of spirits; Saint John Bosco in his passion for the education of the young; Saint John Mary Vianney in his awareness of the grandeur of the priesthood as gift and task; Saint Pius of Pietrelcina in his serving as an instrument of divine mercy; Saint Josemaría Escrivá in his preaching of the universal call to holiness; Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, the missionary of God’s charity towards the poorest of the poor, and then the martyrs of Nazism and Communism, represented by Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), a Carmelite nun, and by Blessed Aloysius Stepinac, the Cardinal Archbishop of Zagreb.

Holiness inspired by the word of God thus belongs in a way to the prophetic tradition, wherein the word of God sets the prophet’s very life at its service. In this sense, holiness in the Church constitutes an interpretation of Scripture which cannot be overlooked. The Holy Spirit who inspired the sacred authors is the same Spirit who impels the saints to offer their lives for the Gospel. In striving to learn from their example, we set out on the sure way towards a living and effective hermeneutic of the word of God.

We saw a direct witness to this link between holiness and the word of God during the Twelfth Assembly of the Synod when four new saints were canonized on 12 October in Saint Peter’s Square: Gaetano Errico, priest and founder of the Congregation of Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary; Mother Maria Bernarda Büttler, a native of Switzerland and a missionary in Ecuador and Colombia; Sister Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception, the first canonized saint born in India; and the young Ecuadorian laywoman Narcisa de Jesús Martillo Morán. With their
lives they testified before the world and the Church to the perennial fruitfulness of Christ’s Gospel. Through the intercession of these saints canonized at the time of the synodal assembly on the word of God, let us ask the Lord that our own lives may be that “good soil” in which the divine sower plants the word, so that it may bear within us fruits of holiness, “thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold” (Mk 4:20).

PART TWO
VERBUM IN ECCLESIA

“But to all who received him he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12)

The Word Of God And The Church

*The Church receives the word*

The Lord speaks his word so that it may be received by those who were created “through” that same word. “He came among his own” (Jn 1:11): his word is not something fundamentally alien to us, and creation was willed in a relationship of familiarity with God’s own life. Yet the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel also places us before the rejection of God’s word by “his own”, who “received him not” (Jn 1:11). Not to receive him means not to listen to his voice, not to be conformed to the Logos. On the other hand, whenever men and women, albeit frail and sinful, are sincerely open to an encounter with Christ, a radical transformation begins to take place: “but to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12).

To receive the Word means to let oneself be shaped by him, and thus to be conformed by the power of the Holy Spirit to Christ, the “only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14). It is the beginning of a new creation; a new creature is born, a new people comes to birth. Those who believe, that is to say, those who live the obedience of faith, are “born of God” (Jn 1:13) and made sharers in the divine life: sons in the Son (cf. Gal 4:5-6; Rom 8:14-17). As Saint Augustine puts it nicely in commenting on this passage from John’s Gospel: “you were created through the word, but now through the word you must be recreated”. Here we can glimpse the face of the
Church as a reality defined by acceptance of the Word of God who, by taking flesh, came to pitch his tent among us (cf. Jn 1:14). This dwelling-place of God among men, this shekinah (cf. Ex 26:1), prefigured in the Old Testament, is now fulfilled in God’s definitive presence among us in Christ.

**Christ’s constant presence in the life of the Church**

The relationship between Christ, the Word of the Father, and the Church cannot be fully understood in terms of a mere past event; rather, it is a living relationship which each member of the faithful is personally called to enter into. We are speaking of the presence of God’s word to us today: “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). As Pope John Paul II has said: “Christ’s relevance for people of all times is shown forth in his body, which is the Church. For this reason the Lord promised his disciples the Holy Spirit, who would ‘bring to their remembrance’ and teach them to understand his commandments (cf. Jn 14:26), and who would be the principle and constant source of a new life in the world (cf. Jn 3:5-8; Rom 8:1-13”).[175] The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* expresses this mystery by using the biblical metaphor of a nuptial dialogue: “God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son. And the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church — and through it in the world — leads believers to the full truth and makes the word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness (cf. Col 3:16).”[176]

The Bride of Christ — the great teacher of the art of listening — today too repeats in faith: “Speak, Lord, your Church is listening”.[177] For this reason the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* intentionally begins with the words: “Hearing the word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently, this sacred Council…”.[178] Here we encounter a dynamic definition of the Church’s life: “With these words the Council indicates a defining aspect of the Church: she is a community that hears and proclaims the word of God. The Church draws life not from herself but from the Gospel, and from the Gospel she discovers ever anew the direction for her journey. This is an approach that every Christian must understand and apply to himself or herself: only those who first place themselves in an attitude of listening to the word can go on to become its
In the word of God proclaimed and heard, and in the sacraments, Jesus says today, here and now, to each person: “I am yours, I give myself to you”; so that we can receive and respond, saying in return: “I am yours.” The Church thus emerges as the milieu in which, by grace, we can experience what John tells us in the Prologue of his Gospel: “to all who received him he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12).

The Liturgy, Privileged Setting

For The Word Of God

The word of God in the sacred liturgy

In considering the Church as “the home of the word”, attention must first be given to the sacred liturgy, for the liturgy is the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives; he speaks today to his people, who hear and respond. Every liturgical action is by its very nature steeped in sacred Scripture. In the words of the Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium, “sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. From it are taken the readings, which are explained in the homily and the psalms that are sung. From Scripture the petitions, prayers and liturgical hymns receive their inspiration and substance. From Scripture the liturgical actions and signs draw their meaning”. Even more, it must be said that Christ himself “is present in his word, since it is he who speaks when Scripture is read in Church”. Indeed, “the liturgical celebration becomes the continuing, complete and effective presentation of God’s word. The word of God, constantly proclaimed in the liturgy, is always a living and effective word through the power of the Holy Spirit. It expresses the Father’s love that never fails in its effectiveness towards us”. The Church has always realized that in the liturgical action the word of God is accompanied by the interior working of the Holy Spirit who makes it effective in the hearts of the faithful. Thanks to the Paraclete, “the word of God becomes the foundation of the liturgical celebration, and the rule and support of all our life. The working of the same Holy Spirit … brings home to each person individually every-thing that in the proclamation of the word of God is spoken for the good of the whole gathering. In strengthening the unity of all, the Holy Spirit at the
same time fosters a diversity of gifts and furthers their multiform operation”.\textsuperscript{[185]}

To understand the word of God, then, we need to appreciate and experience the essential meaning and value of the liturgical action. A faith-filled understanding of sacred Scripture must always refer back to the liturgy, in which the word of God is celebrated as a timely and living word: “In the liturgy the Church faithfully adheres to the way Christ himself read and explained the sacred Scriptures, beginning with his coming forth in the synagogue and urging all to search the Scriptures”.\textsuperscript{[186]}

Here one sees the sage pedagogy of the Church, which proclaims and listens to sacred Scripture following the rhythm of the liturgical year. This expansion of God’s word in time takes place above all in the Eucharistic celebration and in the Liturgy of the Hours. At the centre of everything the paschal mystery shines forth, and around it radiate all the mysteries of Christ and the history of salvation which become sacramentally present: “By recalling in this way the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens up to the faithful the riches of the saving actions and the merits of her Lord, and makes them present to all times, allowing the faithful to enter into contact with them and to be filled with the grace of salvation”.\textsuperscript{[187]} For this reason I encourage the Church’s Pastors and all engaged in pastoral work to see that all the faithful learn to savor the deep meaning of the word of God which unfolds each year in the liturgy, revealing the fundamental mysteries of our faith. This is in turn the basis for a correct approach to sacred Scripture.

\textit{Sacred Scripture and the sacraments}

In discussing the importance of the liturgy for understanding the word of God, the Synod of Bishops highlighted the relationship between sacred Scripture and the working of the sacraments. There is great need for a deeper investigation of the relationship between word and sacrament in the Church’s pastoral activity and in theological reflection.\textsuperscript{[188]} Certainly “the liturgy of the word is a decisive element in the celebration of each one of the sacraments of the Church”;\textsuperscript{[189]} in pastoral practice, however, the faithful are not always conscious of this connection, nor do they appreciate the unity between gesture and word. It is “the task of priests and deacons,
above all when they administer the sacraments, to explain the unity between word and sacrament in the ministry of the Church.”[190] The relationship between word and sacramental gesture is the liturgical expression of God’s activity in the history of salvation through the performative character of the word itself. In salvation history there is no separation between what God says and what he does. His word appears as alive and active (cf. Heb 4:12), as the Hebrew term dabar itself makes clear. In the liturgical action too, we encounter his word which accomplishes what it says. By educating the People of God to discover the performative character of God’s word in the liturgy, we will help them to recognize his activity in salvation history and in their individual lives.

The word of God and the Eucharist

What has been said in general about the relationship between the word and the sacraments takes on deeper meaning when we turn to the celebration of the Eucharist. The profound unity of word and Eucharist is grounded in the witness of Scripture (cf. Jn 6; Lk 24), attested to by the Fathers of the Church, and reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council.[191] Here we think of Jesus’ discourse on the bread of life in the synagogue of Capernaum (cf. Jn 6:22-69), with its underlying comparison between Moses and Jesus, between the one who spoke face to face with God (cf. Exod 33:11) and the one who makes God known (cf. Jn 1:18). Jesus’ discourse on the bread speaks of the gift of God, which Moses obtained for his people with the manna in the desert, which is really the Torah, the life-giving word of God (cf. Ps 119; Prov 9:5). In his own person Jesus brings to fulfillment the ancient image: “The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” … “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:33-35). Here “the law has become a person. When we encounter Jesus, we feed on the living God himself, so to speak; we truly eat ‘the bread from heaven’”. In the discourse at Capernaum, John’s Prologue is brought to a deeper level. There God’s Logos became flesh, but here this flesh becomes “bread” given for the life of the world (cf. Jn 6:51), with an allusion to Jesus’ self-gift in the mystery of the cross, confirmed by the words about his blood being given as drink (cf. Jn 6:53). The mystery of the Eucharist reveals the true manna, the true bread of heaven: it is God’s Logos made flesh, who gave himself up for us in the paschal mystery.
Luke’s account of the disciples on the way to Emmaus enables us to reflect further on this link between the hearing of the word and the breaking of the bread (cf. Lk 24:13-35). Jesus approached the disciples on the day after the Sabbath, listened as they spoke of their dashed hopes, and, joining them on their journey, “interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (24:27). The two disciples began to look at the Scriptures in a new way in the company of this traveller who seemed so surprisingly familiar with their lives. What had taken place in those days no longer appeared to them as failure, but as fulfillment and a new beginning. And yet, apparently not even these words were enough for the two disciples. The Gospel of Luke relates that “their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (24:31) only when Jesus took the bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them, whereas earlier “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (24:16). The presence of Jesus, first with his words and then with the act of breaking bread, made it possible for the disciples to recognize him. Now they were able to appreciate in a new way all that they had previously experienced with him: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (24:32).

From these accounts it is clear that Scripture itself points us towards an appreciation of its own unbreakable bond with the Eucharist. “It can never be forgotten that the divine word, read and proclaimed by the Church, has as its one purpose the sacrifice of the new covenant and the banquet of grace, that is, the Eucharist”. Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist. Unless we acknowledge the Lord’s real presence in the Eucharist, our understanding of Scripture remains imperfect. For this reason “the Church has honored the word of God and the Eucharistic mystery with the same reverence, although not with the same worship, and has always and everywhere insisted upon and sanctioned such honor. Moved by the example of her Founder, she has never ceased to celebrate his paschal mystery by coming together to read ‘in all the Scriptures the things concerning him’ (Lk 24:27)
and to carry out the work of salvation through the celebration of the memorial of the Lord and through the sacraments.” [194]

The sacramentality of the word

Reflection on the performative character of the word of God in the sacramental action and a growing appreciation of the relationship between word and Eucharist lead to yet another significant theme which emerged during the synodal assembly, that of the sacramentality of the word. [195] Here it may help to recall that Pope John Paul II had made reference to the “sacramental character of revelation” and in particular to “the sign of the Eucharist in which the indissoluble unity between the signifier and signified makes it possible to grasp the depths of the mystery.” [196] We come to see that at the heart of the sacramentality of the word of God is the mystery of the Incarnation itself: “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14), the reality of the revealed mystery is offered to us in the “flesh” of the Son. The Word of God can be perceived by faith through the “sign” of human words and actions. Faith acknowledges God’s Word by accepting the words and actions by which he makes himself known to us. The sacramental character of revelation points in turn to the history of salvation, to the way that word of God enters time and space, and speaks to men and women, who are called to accept his gift in faith.

The sacramentality of the word can thus be understood by analogy with the real presence of Christ under the appearances of the consecrated bread and wine. [197] By approaching the altar and partaking in the Eucharistic banquet we truly share in the body and blood of Christ. The proclamation of God’s word at the celebration entails an acknowledgment that Christ himself is present, that he speaks to us, [198] and that he wishes to be heard. Saint Jerome speaks of the way we ought to approach both the Eucharist and the word of God: “We are reading the sacred Scriptures. For me, the Gospel is the Body of Christ; for me, the holy Scriptures are his teaching. And when he says: whoever does not eat my flesh and drink my blood (Jn 6:53), even though these words can also be understood of the [Eucharistic] Mystery, Christ’s body and blood are really the word of Scripture, God’s teaching. When we approach the [Eucharistic] Mystery, if a crumb falls to the ground we are troubled. Yet when we are listening to the word of God, and God’s Word and Christ’s flesh and blood are being poured into our
ears yet we pay no heed, what great peril should we not feel?”[199] Christ, truly present under the species of bread and wine, is analogously present in the word proclaimed in the liturgy. A deeper understanding of the sacramentality of God’s word can thus lead us to a more unified understanding of the mystery of revelation, which takes place through “deeds and words intimately connected”;[200] an appreciation of this can only benefit the spiritual life of the faithful and the Church’s pastoral activity.

**Sacred Scripture and the Lectionary**

In stressing the bond between word and Eucharist, the Synod also rightly wanted to call attention to certain aspects of the celebration which concern the service of the word. In the first place I wish to mention the importance of the Lectionary. The reform called for by the Second Vatican Council[201] has borne fruit in a richer access to sacred Scripture, which is now offered in abundance, especially at Sunday Mass. The present structure of the Lectionary not only presents the more important texts of Scripture with some frequency, but also helps us to understand the unity of God’s plan thanks to the interplay of the Old and New Testament readings, an interplay “in which Christ is the central figure, commemorated in his paschal mystery”.[202] Any remaining difficulties in seeing the relationship between those readings should be approached in the light of canonical interpretation, that is to say, by referring to the inherent unity of the Bible as a whole. Wherever necessary, the competent offices and groups can make provision for publications aimed at bringing out the interconnection of the Lectionary readings, all of which are to be proclaimed to the liturgical assembly as called for by the liturgy of the day. Other problems or difficulties should be brought to the attention of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Nor should we overlook the fact that the current Lectionary of the Latin rite has ecumenical significance, since it is used and valued also by communities not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church. The issue of the Lectionary presents itself differently in the liturgies of the Eastern Catholic Churches; the Synod requested that this issue be “examined authoritatively”,[203] in accordance with the proper tradition and competences of the *sui iuris* Churches, likewise taking into account the
Proclamation of the word and the ministry of Reader

The Synod on the Eucharist had already called for greater care to be taken in the proclamation of the word of God. As is known, while the Gospel is proclaimed by a priest or deacon, in the Latin tradition the first and second readings are proclaimed by an appointed reader, whether a man or a woman. I would like to echo the Synod Fathers who once more stressed the need for the adequate training of those who exercise the munus of reader in liturgical celebrations, and particularly those who exercise the ministry of Reader, which in the Latin rite is, as such, a lay ministry. All those entrusted with this office, even those not instituted in the ministry of Reader, should be truly suitable and carefully trained. This training should be biblical and liturgical, as well as technical: “The purpose of their biblical formation is to give readers the ability to understand the readings in context and to perceive by the light of faith central point of the revealed message. The liturgical formation ought to equip readers to have some grasp of the meaning and structure of the liturgy of the word and the significance of its connection with the liturgy of the Eucharist. The technical preparation should make the readers skilled in the art of reading publicly, either with the power of their own voice or with the help of sound equipment.”

The importance of the homily

Each member of the People of God “has different duties and responsibilities with respect to the word of God. Accordingly, the faithful listen to God’s word and meditate on it, but those who have the office of teaching by virtue of sacred ordination or have been entrusted with exercising that ministry”, namely, bishops, priests and deacons, “expound the word of God”. Hence we can understand the attention paid to the homily throughout the Synod. In the Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis, I pointed out that “given the importance of the word of God, the quality of homilies needs to be improved. The homily ‘is part of the liturgical action’ and is meant to foster a deeper understanding of the word of God, so that it can bear fruit in the lives of the faithful.” The homily is a means of bringing the scriptural message to life in a way that helps the
faithful to realize that God’s word is present and at work in their everyday lives. It should lead to an understanding of the mystery being celebrated, serve as a summons to mission, and prepare the assembly for the profession of faith, the universal prayer and the Eucharistic liturgy. Consequently, those who have been charged with preaching by virtue of a specific ministry ought to take this task to heart. Generic and abstract homilies which obscure the directness of God’s word should be avoided, as well as useless digressions which risk drawing greater attention to the preacher than to the heart of the Gospel message. The faithful should be able to perceive clearly that the preacher has a compelling desire to present Christ, who must stand at the centre of every homily. For this reason preachers need to be in close and constant contact with the sacred text;\textsuperscript{[210]} they should prepare for the homily by meditation and prayer, so as to preach with conviction and passion. The synodal assembly asked that the following questions be kept in mind: “What are the Scriptures being proclaimed saying? What do they say to me personally? What should I say to the community in the light of its concrete situation?”\textsuperscript{[211]} The preacher “should be the first to hear the word of God which he proclaims”,\textsuperscript{[212]} since, as Saint Augustine says: “He is undoubtedly barren who preaches outwardly the word of God without hearing it inwardly.”\textsuperscript{[213]} The homily for Sundays and solemnities should be prepared carefully, without neglecting, whenever possible, to offer at weekday Masses \textit{cum populo} brief and timely reflections which can help the faithful to welcome the word which was proclaimed and to let it bear fruit in their lives.

\textit{The fittingness of a Directory on Homiletics}

The art of good preaching based on the Lectionary is an art that needs to be cultivated. Therefore, in continuity with the desire expressed by the previous Synod,\textsuperscript{[214]} I ask the competent authorities, along the lines of the Eucharistic Compendium,\textsuperscript{[215]} also to prepare practical publications to assist ministers in carrying out their task as best they can: as for example a Directory on the homily, in which preachers can find useful assistance in preparing to exercise their ministry. As Saint Jerome reminds us, preaching needs to be accompanied by the witness of a good life: “Your actions should not contradict your words, lest when you preach in Church,
someone may begin to think: ‘So why don’t you yourself act that way?’ … In the priest of Christ, thought and word must be in agreement’.

*The word of God, Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick*

Though the Eucharist certainly remains central to the relationship between God’s word and the sacraments, we must also stress the importance of sacred Scripture in the other sacraments, especially the sacraments of healing, namely the sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance, and the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The role of sacred Scripture in these sacraments is often overlooked, yet it needs to be assured its proper place. We ought never to forget that “the word of God is a word of reconciliation, for in it God has reconciled all things to himself (cf. 2 Cor 5:18–20; Eph 1:10). The loving forgiveness of God, made flesh in Jesus, raises up the sinner”.

“Through the word of God the Christian receives light to recognize his sins and is called to conversion and to confidence in God’s mercy”. To have a deeper experience of the reconciling power of God’s word, the individual penitent should be encouraged to prepare for confession by meditating on a suitable text of sacred Scripture and to begin confession by reading or listening to a biblical exhortation such as those provided in the rite. When expressing contrition it would be good if the penitent were to use “a prayer based on the words of Scripture”, such as those indicated in the rite. When possible, it would be good that at particular times of the year, or whenever the opportunity presents itself, individual confession by a number of penitents should take place within penitential celebrations as provided for by the ritual, with due respect for the different liturgical traditions; here greater time can be devoted to the celebration of the word through the use of suitable readings.

In the case of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick too, it must not be forgotten that “the healing power of the word of God is a constant call to the listener’s personal conversion”. Sacred Scripture contains countless pages which speak of the consolation, support and healing which God brings. We can think particularly of Jesus’ own closeness to those who suffer, and how he, God’s incarnate Word, shouldered our pain and suffered out of love for us, thus giving meaning to sickness and death. It is good that in parishes and in hospitals, according to circumstances, community celebrations of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick
should be held. On these occasions greater space should be given to the celebration of the word, and the sick helped to endure their sufferings in faith, in union with the redemptive sacrifice of Christ who delivers us from evil.

**The word of God and the Liturgy of the Hours**

Among the forms of prayer which emphasize sacred Scripture, the Liturgy of the Hours has an undoubted place. The Synod Fathers called it “a privileged form of hearing the word of God, inasmuch as it brings the faithful into contact with Scripture and the living Tradition of the Church”. Above all, we should reflect on the profound theological and ecclesial dignity of this prayer. “In the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church, exercising the priestly office of her Head, offers ‘incessantly’ (1 Thess 5:17) to God the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name (cf. Heb 13:15). This prayer is ‘the voice of a bride speaking to her bridegroom, it is the very prayer that Christ himself, together with his Body, addressed to the Father’”. The Second Vatican Council stated in this regard that “all who take part in this prayer not only fulfill a duty of the Church, but also share in the high honor of the spouse of Christ; for by celebrating the praises of God, they stand before his throne in the name of the Church, their Mother”. The Liturgy of the Hours, as the public prayer of the Church, sets forth the Christian ideal of the sanctification of the entire day, marked by the rhythm of hearing the word of God and praying the Psalms; in this way every activity can find its point of reference in the praise offered to God.

Those who by virtue of their state in life are obliged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours should carry out this duty faithfully for the benefit of the whole Church. Bishops, priests and deacons aspiring to the priesthood, all of whom have been charged by the Church to celebrate this liturgy, are obliged to pray all the Hours daily. As for the obligation of celebrating this liturgy in the Eastern Catholic Churches sui iuris, the prescriptions of their proper law are to be followed. I also encourage communities of consecrated life to be exemplary in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, and thus to become a point of reference and an inspiration for the spiritual and pastoral life of the whole Church.
The Synod asked that this prayer become more widespread among the People of God, particularly the recitation of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. This could only lead to greater familiarity with the word of God on the part of the faithful. Emphasis should also be placed on the value of the Liturgy of the Hours for the First Vespers of Sundays and Solemnities, particularly in the Eastern Catholic Churches. To this end I recommend that, wherever possible, parishes and religious communities promote this prayer with the participation of the lay faithful.

The word of God and the Book of Blessings

Likewise, in using the Book of Blessings attention should be paid to the space allotted to proclaiming, hearing and briefly explaining the word of God. Indeed the act of blessing, in the cases provided for by the Church and requested by the faithful, should not be something isolated but related in its proper degree to the liturgical life of the People of God. In this sense a blessing, as a genuine sacred sign which “derives its meaning and effectiveness from God’s word that is proclaimed”.[226] So it is important also to use these situations as means of reawakening in the faithful a hunger and thirst for every word that comes from the mouth of God (cf. Mt 4:4).

Suggestions and practical proposals for promoting fuller participation in the liturgy

Having discussed some basic elements of the relationship between the liturgy and the word of God, I would now like to take up and develop several proposals and suggestions advanced by the Synod Fathers with a view to making the People of God ever more familiar with the word of God in the context of liturgical actions or, in any event, with reference to them.

a) Celebrations of the word of God

The Synod Fathers encouraged all pastors to promote times devoted to the celebration of the word in the communities entrusted to their care.[227] These celebrations are privileged occasions for an encounter with the Lord. This practice will certainly benefit the faithful, and should be considered an important element of liturgical formation. Celebrations of this sort are
particularly significant as a preparation for the Sunday Eucharist; they are also a way to help the faithful to delve deeply into the riches of the Lectionary, and to pray and meditate on sacred Scripture, especially during the great liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter. Celebrations of the word of God are to be highly recommended especially in those communities which, due to a shortage of clergy, are unable to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice on Sundays and holydays of obligation. Keeping in mind the indications already set forth in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis with regard to Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, I recommend that competent authorities prepare ritual directories, drawing on the experience of the particular Churches. This will favor, in such circumstances, celebrations of the word capable of nourishing the faith of believers, while avoiding the danger of the latter being confused with celebrations of the Eucharist: “on the contrary, they should be privileged moments of prayer for God to send holy priests after his own heart”.

The Synod Fathers also recommended celebrations of the word of God on pilgrimages, special feasts, popular missions, spiritual retreats and special days of penance, reparation or pardon. The various expressions of popular piety, albeit not liturgical acts and not to be confused with liturgical celebrations, should nonetheless be inspired by the latter and, above all, give due space to the proclamation and hearing of God’s word; “popular piety can find in the word of God an inexhaustible source of inspiration, insuperable models of prayer and fruitful points for reflection”.

b) The word and silence

In their interventions, a good number of Synod Fathers insisted on the importance of silence in relation to the word of God and its reception in the lives of the faithful. The word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence. Rediscovering the centrality of God’s word in the life of the Church also means rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner
repose. The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence.[232] Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence. Our liturgies must facilitate this attitude of authentic listening: *Verbo crescente, verba deficiunt.*[233]

The importance of all this is particularly evident in the Liturgy of the Word, “which should be celebrated in a way that favors meditation”. [234] Silence, when called for, should be considered “a part of the celebration”. [235] Hence I encourage Pastors to foster moments of recollection whereby, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the word of God can find a welcome in our hearts.

c) The solemn proclamation of the word of God

Another suggestion which emerged from the Synod was that the proclamation of the word of God, and the Gospel in particular, should be made more solemn, especially on major liturgical feasts, through the use of the Gospel Book, carried in procession during the opening rites and then brought to the lectern by a deacon or priest for proclamation. This would help the people of God to realize that “the reading of the Gospel is the high point of the liturgy of the word”. [236] Following the indications contained in the *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, it is good that the word of God, especially the Gospel, be enhanced by being proclaimed in song, particularly on certain solemnities. The greeting, the initial announcement: “A reading from the holy Gospel” and the concluding words: “The Gospel of the Lord”, could well be sung as a way of emphasizing the importance of what was read.[237]

d) The word of God in Christian churches

In order to facilitate hearing the word of God, consideration should be given to measures which can help focus the attention of the faithful. Concern should be shown for church acoustics, with due respect for liturgical and architectural norms. “Bishops, duly assisted, in the construction of churches should take care that they be adapted to the proclamation of the word, to meditation and to the celebration of the Eucharist. Sacred spaces, even apart from the liturgical action, should be
eloquent and should present the Christian mystery in relation to the word of God”.[238]

Special attention should be given to the ambo as the liturgical space from which the word of God is proclaimed. It should be located in a clearly visible place to which the attention of the faithful will be naturally drawn during the liturgy of the word. It should be fixed, and decorated in aesthetic harmony with the altar, in order to present visibly the theological significance of the double table of the word and of the Eucharist. The readings, the responsorial psalm and the Exsultet are to be proclaimed from the ambo; it can also be used for the homily and the prayers of the faithful.[239]

The Synod Fathers also proposed that churches give a place of honor to the sacred Scriptures, even outside of liturgical celebrations.[240] It is good that the book which contains the word of God should enjoy a visible place of honor inside the Christian temple, without prejudice to the central place proper to the tabernacle containing the Blessed Sacrament.[241]

e) The exclusive use of biblical texts in the liturgy

The Synod also clearly reaffirmed a point already laid down by liturgical law,[242] namely that the readings drawn from sacred Scripture may never be replaced by other texts, however significant the latter may be from a spiritual or pastoral standpoint: “No text of spirituality or literature can equal the value and riches contained in sacred Scripture, which is the word of God”. This is an ancient rule of the Church which is to be maintained.[244] In the face of certain abuses, Pope John Paul II had already reiterated the importance of never using other readings in place of sacred Scripture.[245] It should also be kept in mind that the Responsorial Psalm is also the word of God, and hence should not be replaced by other texts; indeed it is most appropriate that it be sung.

f) Biblically-inspired liturgical song

As part of the enhancement of the word of God in the liturgy, attention should also be paid to the use of song at the times called for by the particular rite. Preference should be given to songs which are of clear biblical inspiration and which express, through the harmony of music and words, the beauty of God’s word. We would do well to make the most of
those songs handed down to us by the Church’s tradition which respect this criterion. I think in particular of the importance of Gregorian chant.[246]

g) Particular concern for the visually and hearing impaired

Here I wish also to recall the Synod’s recommendation that special attention be given to those who encounter problems in participating actively in the liturgy; I think, for example, of the visually and hearing impaired. I encourage our Christian communities to offer every possible practical assistance to our brothers and sisters suffering from such impairments, so that they too can be able to experience a living contact with the word of the Lord.[247]

The Word of God in the Life of the Church

Encountering the word of God in sacred Scripture

If it is true that the liturgy is the privileged place for the proclamation, hearing and celebration of the word of God, it is likewise the case that this encounter must be prepared in the hearts of the faithful and then deepened and assimilated, above all by them. The Christian life is essentially marked by an encounter with Jesus Christ, who calls us to follow him. For this reason, the Synod of Bishops frequently spoke of the importance of pastoral care in the Christian communities as the proper setting where a personal and communal journey based on the word of God can occur and truly serve as the basis for our spiritual life. With the Synod Fathers I express my heartfelt hope for the flowering of “a new season of greater love for sacred Scripture on the part of every member of the People of God, so that their prayerful and faith-filled reading of the Bible will, with time, deepen their personal relationship with Jesus”.[248]

Throughout the history of the Church, numerous saints have spoken of the need for knowledge of Scripture in order to grow in love for Christ. This is evident particularly in the Fathers of the Church. Saint Jerome, in his great love for the word of God, often wondered: “How could one live without the knowledge of Scripture, by which we come to know Christ himself, who is the life of believers?”.[249] He knew well that the Bible is the means “by which God speaks daily to believers”.[250] His advice to the
Roman matron Leta about raising her daughter was this: “Be sure that she studies a passage of Scripture each day… Prayer should follow reading, and reading follow prayer… so that in the place of jewelry and silk, she may love the divine books”.[251] Jerome’s counsel to the priest Nepotian can also be applied to us: “Read the divine Scriptures frequently; indeed, the sacred book should never be out of your hands. Learn there what you must teach”.[252] Let us follow the example of this great saint who devoted his life to the study of the Bible and who gave the Church its Latin translation, the Vulgate, as well as the example of all those saints who made an encounter with Christ the center of their spiritual lives. Let us renew our efforts to understand deeply the word which God has given to his Church: thus we can aim for that “high standard of ordinary Christian living”[253] proposed by Pope John Paul II at the beginning of the third Christian millennium, which finds constant nourishment in attentively hearing the word of God.

**Letting the Bible inspire pastoral activity**

Along these lines the Synod called for a particular pastoral commitment to emphasizing the centrality of the word of God in the Church’s life, and recommended a greater “biblical apostolate”, not alongside other forms of pastoral work, but as a means of letting the Bible inspire all pastoral work”. [254] This does not mean adding a meeting here or there in parishes or dioceses, but rather of examining the ordinary activities of Christian communities, in parishes, associations and movements, to see if they are truly concerned with fostering a personal encounter with Christ, who gives himself to us in his word. Since “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”,[255] making the Bible the inspiration of every ordinary and extraordinary pastoral outreach will lead to a greater awareness of the person of Christ, who reveals the Father and is the fullness of divine revelation.

For this reason I encourage pastors and the faithful to recognize the importance of this emphasis on the Bible: it will also be the best way to deal with certain pastoral problems which were discussed at the Synod and have to do, for example, with the proliferation of sects which spread a distorted and manipulative reading of sacred Scripture. Where the faithful are not helped to know the Bible in accordance with the Church’s faith and
based on her living Tradition, this pastoral vacuum becomes fertile ground for realities like the sects to take root. Provision must also be made for the suitable preparation of priests and lay persons who can instruct the People of God in the genuine approach to Scripture.

Furthermore, as was brought out during the Synod sessions, it is good that pastoral activity also favor the growth of small communities, “formed by families or based in parishes or linked to the different ecclesial movements and new communities”,[256] which can help to promote formation, prayer and knowledge of the Bible in accordance with the Church’s faith.

*The biblical dimension of catechesis*

An important aspect of the Church’s pastoral work which, if used wisely, can help in rediscovering the centrality of God’s word is catechesis, which in its various forms and levels must constantly accompany the journey of the People of God. Luke’s description (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35) of the disciples who meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus represents, in some sense, the model of a catechesis centered on “the explanation of the Scriptures”, an explanation which Christ alone can give (cf. *Lk* 24:27-28), as he shows that they are fulfilled in his person.[257] The hope which triumphs over every failure was thus reborn, and made those disciples convinced and credible witnesses of the Risen Lord.

The General Catechetical Directory contains valuable guidelines for a biblically inspired catechesis and I readily encourage that these be consulted.[258] Here I wish first and foremost to stress that catechesis “must be permeated by the mindset, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and the Gospels through assiduous contact with the texts themselves; yet it also means remembering that catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts with the mind and the heart of the Church”,[259] and for drawing inspiration from the two millennia of the Church’s reflection and life. A knowledge of biblical personages, events and well-known sayings should thus be encouraged; this can also be promoted by the judicious memorization of some passages which are particularly expressive of the Christian mysteries. Catechetical work always entails approaching Scripture in faith and in the Church’s Tradition, so that its words can be
perceived as living, just as Christ is alive today wherever two or three are gathered in his name (cf. Mt 18:20). Catechesis should communicate in a lively way the history of salvation and the content of the Church’s faith, and so enable every member of the faithful to realize that this history is also a part of his or her own life.

Here it is important to stress the relationship between sacred Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as it is set forth in the General Catechetical Directory: “Sacred Scripture, in fact, as ‘the word of God written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit’, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as a significant contemporary expression of the living Tradition of the Church and a sure norm for teaching the faith, are called, each in its own way and according to its specific authority, to nourish catechesis in the Church today”.[260]

*The biblical formation of Christians*

In order to achieve the goal set by the Synod, namely, an increased emphasis on the Bible in the Church’s pastoral activity, all Christians, and catechists in particular, need to receive suitable training. Attention needs to be paid to the biblical apostolate, which is a very valuable means to that end, as the Church’s experience has shown. The Synod Fathers also recommended that, possibly through the use of existing academic structures, centers of formation should be established where laity and missionaries can be trained to understand, live and proclaim the word of God. Also, where needed, specialized institutes for biblical studies should be established to ensure that exegetes possess a solid understanding of theology and an appropriate appreciation for the contexts in which they carry out their mission.[261]

*Sacred Scripture in large ecclesial gatherings*

Among a variety of possible initiatives, the Synod suggested that in meetings, whether at the diocesan, national or international levels, greater emphasis be given to the importance of the word of God, its attentive hearing, and the faith-filled and prayerful reading of the Bible. In Eucharistic Congresses, whether national or international, at World Youth Days and other gatherings, it would be praiseworthy to make greater room
for the celebration of the word and for biblically-inspired moments of formation.\[262\]

**The Word of God and Vocations**

In stressing faith’s intrinsic summons to an ever deeper relationship with Christ, the word of God in our midst, the Synod also emphasized that this word calls each one of us personally, revealing that life itself is a vocation from God. In other words, the more we grow in our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, the more we realize that he is calling us to holiness in and through the definitive choices by which we respond to his love in our lives, taking up tasks and ministries which help to build up the Church. This is why the Synod frequently encouraged all Christians to grow in their relationship with the word of God, not only because of their Baptism, but also in accordance with their call to various states in life. Here we touch upon one of the pivotal points in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which insisted that each member of the faithful is called to holiness according to his or her proper state in life.\[263\] Our call to holiness is revealed in sacred Scripture: “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:7). Saint Paul then points out its Christological basis: in Christ, the Father “has chosen us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:4). Paul’s greeting to his brothers and sisters in the community of Rome can be taken as addressed to each of us: “To all God’s beloved, who are called to be saints: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!” (Rom 1:7).

**a) Ordained Ministers and the Word of God**

I would like to speak first to the Church’s ordained ministers, in order to remind them of the Synod’s statement that “the word of God is indispensable in forming the heart of a good shepherd and minister of the word”.\[264\] Bishops, priests, and deacons can hardly think that they are living out their vocation and mission apart from a decisive and renewed commitment to sanctification, one of whose pillars is contact with God’s word.

To those called to the episcopate, who are the first and most authoritative heralds of the word, I would repeat the words of Pope John
Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*. For the nourishment and progress of his spiritual life, the Bishop must always put “in first place, reading and meditation on the word of God. Every Bishop must commend himself and feel himself commended ‘to the Lord and to the word of his grace, which is able to build up and to give the inheritance among all those who are sanctified’ (*Acts* 20:32). Before becoming one who hands on the word, the Bishop, together with his priests and indeed like every member of the faithful, and like the Church herself, must be a hearer of the word. He should dwell ‘within’ the word and allow himself to be protected and nourished by it, as if by a mother’s womb”. To all my brother Bishops I recommend frequent personal reading and study of sacred Scripture, in imitation of Mary, *Virgo Audiens* and Queen of the Apostles.

To priests too, I would recall the words of Pope John Paul II, who in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, stated that “the priest is first of all a minister of the word of God, consecrated and sent to announce the Good News of the Kingdom to all, calling every person to the obedience of faith and leading believers to an ever increasing knowledge of and communion in the mystery of God, as revealed and communicated to us in Christ. For this reason the priest himself ought first of all to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. Knowledge of its linguistic and exegetical aspects, though certainly necessary, is not enough. He needs to approach the word with a docile and prayerful heart so that it may deeply penetrate his thoughts and feelings and bring about a new outlook in him — ‘the mind of Christ’ (*1 Cor* 2:16)”. Consequently, his words, his choices and his behavior must increasingly become a reflection, proclamation and witness of the Gospel; “only if he ‘abides’ in the word will the priest become a perfect disciple of the Lord. Only then will he know the truth and be set truly free”.

In a word, the priestly vocation demands that one be consecrated “in the truth”. Jesus states this clearly with regard to his disciples: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (*Jn* 17:17-18). The disciples in a certain sense become “drawn into intimacy with God by being immersed in the word of God. God’s word is, so to speak, the purifying bath, the creative
power which changes them and makes them belong to God”.[268] And since Christ himself is God’s Word made flesh (Jn 1:14) — “the Truth” (Jn 14:6) — Jesus’ prayer to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth”, means in the deepest sense: “Make them one with me, the Christ. Bind them to me. Draw them into me. For there is only one priest of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ himself”.[269] Priests need to grow constantly in their awareness of this reality.

I would also like to speak of the place of God’s word in the life of those called to the diaconate, not only as the final step towards the order of priesthood, but as a permanent service. The Directory for the Permanent Diaconate states that “the deacon’s theological identity clearly provides the features of his specific spirituality, which is presented essentially as a spirituality of service. The model par excellence is Christ as servant, lived totally at the service of God, for the good of humanity”.[270] From this perspective, one can see how, in the various dimensions of the diaconal ministry, a “characteristic element of diaconal spirituality is the word of God, of which the deacon is called to be an authoritative preacher, believing what he preaches, teaching what he believes, and living what he teaches”.[271] Hence, I recommend that deacons nourish their lives by the faith-filled reading of sacred Scripture, accompanied by study and prayer. They should be introduced to “sacred Scripture and its correct interpretation; to the relationship between Scripture and Tradition; in particular to the use of Scripture in preaching, in catechesis and in pastoral activity in general”.[272]

b) The word of God and candidates for Holy Orders

The Synod attributed particular importance to the decisive role that the word of God must play in the spiritual life of candidates for the ministerial priesthood: “Candidates for the priesthood must learn to love the word of God. Scripture should thus be the soul of their theological formation, and emphasis must be given to the indispensable interplay of exegesis, theology, spirituality and mission”.[273] Those aspiring to the ministerial priesthood are called to a profound personal relationship with God’s word, particularly in lectio divina, so that this relationship will in turn nurture their vocation: it is in the light and strength of God’s word that one’s specific vocation can be discerned and appreciated, loved and followed, and one’s proper mission
carried out, by nourishing the heart with thoughts of God, so that faith, as our response to the word, may become a new criterion for judging and evaluating persons and things, events and issues.[274]

Such attention to the prayerful reading of Scripture must not in any way lead to a dichotomy with regard to the exegetical studies which are a part of formation. The Synod recommended that seminarians be concretely helped to see the relationship between biblical studies and scriptural prayer. The study of Scripture ought to lead to an increased awareness of the mystery of divine revelation and foster an attitude of prayerful response to the Lord who speaks. Conversely, an authentic life of prayer cannot fail to nurture in the candidate’s heart a desire for greater knowledge of the God who has revealed himself in his word as infinite love. Hence, great care should be taken to ensure that seminarians always cultivate this reciprocity between study and prayer in their lives. This end will be served if candidates are introduced to the study of Scripture through methods which favor this integral approach.

c) The word of God and the consecrated life

With regard to the consecrated life, the Synod first recalled that it “is born from hearing the word of God and embracing the Gospel as its rule of life”. A life devoted to following Christ in his chastity, poverty and obedience thus becomes “a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word”. The Holy Spirit, in whom the Bible was written, is the same Spirit who illumines “the word of God with new light for the founders and foundresses. Every charism and every rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it”, thus opening up new pathways of Christian living marked by the radicalism of the Gospel.

Here I would mention that the great monastic tradition has always considered meditation on sacred Scripture to be an essential part of its specific spirituality, particularly in the form of lectio divina. Today too, both old and new expressions of special consecration are called to be genuine schools of the spiritual life, where the Scriptures can be read according to the Holy Spirit in the Church, for the benefit of the entire People of God. The Synod therefore recommended that communities of consecrated life...
always make provision for solid instruction in the faith-filled reading of the Bible.[278]

Once again I would like to echo the consideration and gratitude that the Synod expressed with regard to those forms of contemplative life whose specific charism is to devote a great part of their day to imitating the Mother of God, who diligently pondered the words and deeds of her Son (cf. Lk 2:19, 51), and Mary of Bethany, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened attentively to his words (cf. Lk 10:38). I think in particular of monks and cloistered nuns, who by virtue of their separation from the world are all the more closely united to Christ, the heart of the world. More than ever, the Church needs the witness of men and women resolved to “put nothing before the love of Christ”. The world today is often excessively caught up in outward activities and risks losing its bearings. Contemplative men and women, by their lives of prayer, attentive hearing and meditation on God’s Word, remind us that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (cf. Mt 4:4). All the faithful, then, should be clearly conscious that this form of life “shows today’s world what is most important, indeed, the one thing necessary: there is an ultimate reason which makes life worth living, and that is God and his inscrutable love”. [280]

d) The word of God and the lay faithful

The Synod frequently spoke of the laity and thanked them for their generous activity in spreading the Gospel in the various settings of daily life, at work and in the schools, in the family and in education.[281] This responsibility, rooted in Baptism, needs to develop through an ever more conscious Christian way of life capable of “accounting for the hope” within us (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus points out that “the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the Kingdom” (13:38). These words apply especially to the Christian laity, who live out their specific vocation to holiness by a life in the Spirit expressed “in a particular way by their engagement in temporal matters and by their participation in earthly activities”. The laity need to be trained to discern God’s will through a familiarity with his word, read and studied in the Church under the guidance of her legitimate pastors. They can receive this training at the school of the great ecclesial spiritualities, all of which
are grounded in sacred Scripture. Wherever possible, dioceses themselves should provide an opportunity for continuing formation to lay persons charged with particular ecclesial responsibilities.\[283\]

**e) The word of God, marriage and the family**

The Synod also felt the need to stress the relationship between the word of God, marriage and the Christian family. Indeed, “with the proclamation of the word of God, the Church reveals to Christian families their true identity, what it is and what it must be in accordance with the Lord’s plan”.\[284\] Consequently, it must never be forgotten that the word of God is at the very origin of marriage (cf. Gen 2:24) and that Jesus himself made marriage one of the institutions of his Kingdom (cf. Mt 19:4-8), elevating to the dignity of a sacrament what was inscribed in human nature from the beginning. “In the celebration of the sacrament, a man and a woman speak a prophetic word of reciprocal self-giving, that of being ‘one flesh’, a sign of the mystery of the union of Christ with the Church (cf. Eph 5:31-32)”.\[285\] Fidelity to God’s word leads us to point out that nowadays this institution is in many ways under attack from the current mentality. In the face of widespread confusion in the sphere of affectivity, and the rise of ways of thinking which trivialize the human body and sexual differentiation, the word of God re-affirms the original goodness of the human being, created as man and woman and called to a love which is faithful, reciprocal and fruitful.

The great mystery of marriage is the source of the essential responsibility of parents towards their children. Part of authentic parenthood is to pass on and bear witness to the meaning of life in Christ: through their fidelity and the unity of family life, spouses are the first to proclaim God’s word to their children. The ecclesial community must support and assist them in fostering family prayer, attentive hearing of the word of God, and knowledge of the Bible. To this end the Synod urged that every household have its Bible, to be kept in a worthy place and used for reading and prayer. Whatever help is needed in this regard can be provided by priests, deacons and a well-prepared laity. The Synod also recommended the formation of small communities of families, where common prayer and meditation on passages of Scripture can be cultivated.\[286\] Spouses should also remember that “the Word of God is a
precious support amid the difficulties which arise in marriage and in family life”.[287]

Here I would like to highlight the recommendations of the Synod concerning the role of women in relation to the word of God. Today, more than in the past, the “feminine genius”,[288] to use the words of John Paul II, has contributed greatly to the understanding of Scripture and to the whole life of the Church, and this is now also the case with biblical studies. The Synod paid special attention to the indispensable role played by women in the family, education, catechesis and the communication of values. “They have an ability to lead people to hear God’s word, to enjoy a personal relationship with God, and to show the meaning of forgiveness and of evangelical sharing”.[289] They are likewise messengers of love, models of mercy and peacemakers; they communicate warmth and humanity in a world which all too often judges people according to the ruthless criteria of exploitation and profit.

*The prayerful reading of sacred Scripture and “lectio divina”*

The Synod frequently insisted on the need for a prayerful approach to the sacred text as a fundamental element in the spiritual life of every believer, in the various ministries and states in life, with particular reference to *lectio divina*. The word of God is at the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality. The Synod Fathers thus took up the words of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*: “Let the faithful go gladly to the sacred text itself, whether in the sacred liturgy, which is full of the divine words, or in devout reading, or in such suitable exercises and various other helps which, with the approval and guidance of the pastors of the Church, are happily spreading everywhere in our day. Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture”. The Council thus sought to reappropriate the great patristic tradition which had always recommended approaching the Scripture in dialogue with God. As Saint Augustine puts it: “Your prayer is the word you speak to God. When you read the Bible, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak to God”. Origen, one of the great masters of this way of reading the Bible, maintains that understanding Scripture demands, even more than study, closeness to Christ and prayer. Origen was convinced, in fact, that the best way to know God is through love, and that there can be no
authentic scientia Christi apart from growth in his love. In his Letter to Gregory, the great Alexandrian theologian gave this advice: “Devote yourself to the lectio of the divine Scriptures; apply yourself to this with perseverance. Do your reading with the intent of believing in and pleasing God. If during the lectio you encounter a closed door, knock and it will be opened to you by that guardian of whom Jesus said, ‘The gatekeeper will open it for him’. By applying yourself in this way to lectio divina, search diligently and with unshakable trust in God for the meaning of the divine Scriptures, which is hidden in great fullness within. You ought not, however, to be satisfied merely with knocking and seeking; to understand the things of God, what is absolutely necessary is oratio. For this reason, the Savior told us not only: ‘Seek and you will find’, and ‘Knock and it shall be opened to you’, but also added, ‘Ask and you shall receive’".[293]

In this regard, however, one must avoid the risk of an individualistic approach, and remember that God’s word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite us in the Truth along our path to God. While it is a word addressed to each of us personally, it is also a word which builds community, which builds the Church. Consequently, the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church. In effect, “a communal reading of Scripture is extremely important, because the living subject in the sacred Scriptures is the People of God, it is the Church… Scripture does not belong to the past, because its subject, the People of God inspired by God himself, is always the same, and therefore the word is always alive in the living subject. As such, it is important to read and experience sacred Scripture in communion with the Church, that is, with all the great witnesses to this word, beginning with the earliest Fathers up to the saints of our own day, up to the present-day magisterium”.[294]

For this reason, the privileged place for the prayerful reading of sacred Scripture is the liturgy, and particularly the Eucharist, in which, as we celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament, the word itself is present and at work in our midst. In some sense the prayerful reading of the Bible, personal and communal, must always be related to the Eucharistic celebration. Just as the adoration of the Eucharist prepares for, accompanies and follows the liturgy of the Eucharist,[295] so too prayerful reading, personal and communal, prepares for, accompanies and deepens
what the Church celebrates when she proclaims the word in a liturgical setting. By so closely relating lectio and liturgy, we can better grasp the criteria which should guide this practice in the area of pastoral care and in the spiritual life of the People of God.

The documents produced before and during the Synod mentioned a number of methods for a faith-filled and fruitful approach to sacred Scripture. Yet the greatest attention was paid to lectio divina, which is truly “capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God”.[296] I would like here to review the basic steps of this procedure. It opens with the reading (lectio) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas. Next comes meditation (meditatio), which asks: what does the biblical text say to us? Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged. Following this comes prayer (oratio), which asks the question: what do we say to the Lord in response to his word? Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us. Finally, lectio divina concludes with contemplation (contemplatio), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us? In the Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul tells us: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (12:2). Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). The word of God appears here as a criterion for discernment: it is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). We do well also to remember that the process of lectio divina is not concluded until it arrives at action (actio), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.
We find the supreme synthesis and fulfillment of this process in the Mother of God. For every member of the faithful Mary is the model of docile acceptance of God’s word, for she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51); she discovered the profound bond which unites, in God’s great plan, apparently disparate events, actions and things.\[297\]

I would also like to echo what the Synod proposed about the importance of the personal reading of Scripture, also as a practice allowing for the possibility, in accordance with the Church’s usual conditions, of gaining an indulgence either for oneself or for the faithful departed.\[298\] The practice of indulgences\[299\] implies the doctrine of the infinite merits of Christ — which the Church, as the minister of the redemption, dispenses and applies, but it also implies that of the communion of saints, and it teaches us that “to whatever degree we are united in Christ, we are united to one another, and the supernatural life of each one can be useful for the others”.\[300\] From this standpoint, the reading of the word of God sustains us on our journey of penance and conversion, enables us to deepen our sense of belonging to the Church, and helps us to grow in familiarity with God. As Saint Ambrose puts it, “When we take up the sacred Scriptures in faith and read them with the Church, we walk once more with God in the Garden”.\[301\]

**The word of God and Marian prayer**

Mindful of the inseparable bond between the word of God and Mary of Nazareth, along with the Synod Fathers I urge that Marian prayer be encouraged among the faithful, above all in life of families, since it is an aid to meditating on the holy mysteries found in the Scriptures. A most helpful aid, for example, is the individual or communal recitation of the Holy Rosary,\[302\] which ponders the mysteries of Christ’s life in union with Mary,\[303\] and which Pope John Paul II wished to enrich with the mysteries of light.\[304\] It is fitting that the announcement of each mystery be accompanied by a brief biblical text pertinent to that mystery, so as to encourage the memorization of brief biblical passages relevant to the mysteries of Christ’s life.
The Synod also recommended that the faithful be encouraged to pray the Angelus. This prayer, simple yet profound, allows us “to commemorate daily the mystery of the Incarnate Word”.\[305\] It is only right that the People of God, families and communities of consecrated persons, be faithful to this Marian prayer traditionally recited at sunrise, midday and sunset. In the Angelus we ask God to grant that, through Mary’s intercession, we may imitate her in doing his will and in welcoming his word into our lives. This practice can help us to grow in an authentic love for the mystery of the incarnation.

The ancient prayers of the Christian East which contemplate the entire history of salvation in the light of the Theotokos, the Mother of God, are likewise worthy of being known, appreciated and widely used. Here particular mention can be made of the Akathist and Paraklesis prayers. These hymns of praise, chanted in the form of a litany and steeped in the faith of the Church and in references to the Bible, help the faithful to meditate on the mysteries of Christ in union with Mary. In particular, the venerable Akathist hymn to the Mother of God — so-called because it is sung while standing — represents one of the highest expressions of the Marian piety of the Byzantine tradition.\[306\] Praying with these words opens wide the heart and disposes it to the peace that is from above, from God, to that peace which is Christ himself, born of Mary for our salvation.

**The word of God and the Holy Land**

As we call to mind the Word of God who became flesh in the womb of Mary of Nazareth, our heart now turns to the land where the mystery of our salvation was accomplished, and from which the word of God spread to the ends of the earth. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word became flesh in a specific time and place, in a strip of land on the edges of the Roman Empire. The more we appreciate the universality and the uniqueness of Christ’s person, the more we look with gratitude to that land where Jesus was born, where he lived and where he gave his life for us. The stones on which our Redeemer walked are still charged with his memory and continue to “cry out” the Good News. For this reason, the Synod Fathers recalled the felicitous phrase which speaks of the Holy Land as “the Fifth Gospel”.\[307\] How important it is that in those places there be Christian communities, notwithstanding any number of hardships! The
Synod of Bishops expressed profound closeness to all those Christians who dwell in the land of Jesus and bear witness to their faith in the Risen One. Christians there are called to serve not only as “a beacon of faith for the universal Church, but also as a leaven of harmony, wisdom, and equilibrium in the life of a society which traditionally has been, and continues to be, pluralistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious”.  

The Holy Land today remains a goal of pilgrimage for the Christian people, a place of prayer and penance, as was testified to in antiquity by authors like Saint Jerome. The more we turn our eyes and our hearts to the earthly Jerusalem, the more will our yearning be kindled for the heavenly Jerusalem, the true goal of every pilgrimage, along with our eager desire that the name of Jesus, the one name which brings salvation, may be acknowledged by all (cf. Acts 4:12).

PART THREE

VERBUM MUNDO

“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known”

(Jn 1:18)

The Church’s Mission: To Proclaim The Word Of God To The World

The Word from the Father and to the Father

Saint John powerfully expresses the fundamental paradox of the Christian faith. On the one hand, he says that “no one has ever seen God” (Jn 1:18; cf. 1 Jn 4:12). In no way can our imaginations, our concepts or our words ever define or embrace the infinite reality of the Most High. He remains Deus semper maior. Yet Saint John also tells us that the Word truly “became flesh” (Jn 1:14). The only-begotten Son, who is ever with the Father, has made known the God whom “no one has ever seen” (Jn 1:18). Jesus Christ comes to us, “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14), to give us these gifts (cf. Jn 1:17); and “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16). In the Prologue of his Gospel, John thus
contemplates the Word from his being with God to his becoming flesh and his return to the Father with our humanity, which he has assumed for ever. In this coming forth from God and returning to him (cf. Jn 13:3; 16:28; 17:8,10), Christ is presented as the one who “tells us” about God (cf. Jn 1:18). Indeed, as Saint Irenaeus of Lyons says, the Son “is the revealer of the Father”. Jesus of Nazareth is, so to speak, the “exegete” of the God whom “no one has ever seen”. “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). Here we see fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah about the effectiveness of the Lord’s word: as the rain and snow come down from heaven to water and to make the earth fruitful, so too the word of God “shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (cf. Is 55:10f.). Jesus Christ is this definitive and effective word which came forth from the Father and returned to him, perfectly accomplishing his will in the world.

Proclaiming to the world the “Logos” of hope

The word of God has bestowed upon us the divine life which transfigures the face of the earth, making all things new (cf. Rev 21:5). His word engages us not only as hearers of divine revelation, but also as its heralds. The one whom the Father has sent to do his will (cf. Jn 5:36-38; 6:38-40; 7:16-18) draws us to himself and makes us part of his life and mission. The Spirit of the Risen Lord empowers us to proclaim the word everywhere by the witness of our lives. This was experienced by the first Christian community, which saw the word spread through preaching and witness (cf. Acts 6:7). Here we can think in particular of the life of the Apostle Paul, a man completely caught up by the Lord (cf. Phil 3:12) — “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20) — and by his mission: “woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). Paul knew well that what was revealed in Christ is really salvation for all peoples, liberation from the slavery of sin in order to enjoy the freedom of the children of God.

What the Church proclaims to the world is the Logos of Hope (cf. 1 Pet 3:15); in order to be able to live fully each moment, men and women need “the great hope” which is “the God who possesses a human face and who ‘has loved us to the end’ (Jn 13:1)” [311]. This is why the Church is missionary by her very nature. We cannot keep to ourselves the words of
eternal life given to us in our encounter with Jesus Christ: they are meant for everyone, for every man and woman. Everyone today, whether he or she knows it or not, needs this message. May the Lord himself, as in the time of the prophet Amos, raise up in our midst a new hunger and thirst for the word of God (cf. *Amos* 8:11). It is our responsibility to pass on what, by God’s grace, we ourselves have received.

*The word of God is the source of the Church’s mission*

The Synod of Bishops forcefully reaffirmed the need within the Church for a revival of the missionary consciousness present in the People of God from the beginning. The first Christians saw their missionary preaching as a necessity rooted in the very nature of faith: the God in whom they believed was the God of all, the one true God who revealed himself in Israel’s history and ultimately in his Son, who thus provided the response which, in their inmost being, all men and women awaited. The first Christian communities felt that their faith was not part of a particular cultural tradition, differing from one people to another, but belonged instead to the realm of truth, which concerns everyone equally.

Once more it is Saint Paul who, by his life, illustrates the meaning of the Christian mission and its fundamental universality. We can think here of the episode related in the Acts of the Apostles about the Athenian Areopagus (cf. 17:16–34). The Apostle of the Nations enters into dialogue with people of various cultures precisely because he is conscious that the mystery of God, Known yet Unknown, which every man and woman perceives, however confusedly, has really been revealed in history: “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (*Acts* 17:23). In fact, the newness of Christian proclamation is that we can tell all peoples: “God has shown himself. In person. And now the way to him is open. The novelty of the Christian message does not consist in an idea but in a fact: God has revealed himself.”[312]

*The word and the Kingdom of God*

Consequently, the Church’s mission cannot be considered as an optional or supplementary element in her life. Rather it entails letting the Holy Spirit assimilate us to Christ himself, and thus to share in his own mission: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (*Jn* 20:21) to share the
word with your entire life. It is the word itself which impels us towards our brothers and sisters: it is the word which illuminates, purifies, converts; we are only its servants.

We need, then, to discover ever anew the urgency and the beauty of the proclamation of the word for the coming of the Kingdom of God which Christ himself preached. Thus we grow in the realization, so clear to the Fathers of the Church, that the proclamation of the word has as its content the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 1:14-15), which, in the memorable phrase of Origen,[313] is the very person of Jesus (Autobasileia ). The Lord offers salvation to men and women in every age. All of us recognize how much the light of Christ needs to illumine every area of human life: the family, schools, culture, work, leisure and the other aspects of social life.[314] It is not a matter of preaching a word of consolation, but rather a word which disrupts, which calls to conversion and which opens the way to an encounter with the one through whom a new humanity flowers.

All the baptized are responsible for this proclamation

Since the entire People of God is a people which has been “sent”, the Synod reaffirmed that “the mission of proclaiming the word of God is the task of all of the disciples of Jesus Christ based on their Baptism”. [315] No believer in Christ can feel dispensed from this responsibility which comes from the fact of our sacramentally belonging to the Body of Christ. A consciousness of this must be revived in every family, parish, community, association and ecclesial movement. The Church, as a mystery of communion, is thus entirely missionary, and everyone, according to his or her proper state in life, is called to give an incisive contribution to the proclamation of Christ.

Bishops and priests, in accordance with their specific mission, are the first to be called to live a life completely at the service of the word, to proclaim the Gospel, to celebrate the sacraments and to form the faithful in the authentic knowledge of Scripture. Deacons too must feel themselves called to cooperate, in accordance with their specific mission, in this task of evangelization.

Throughout the Church’s history the consecrated life has been outstanding for explicitly taking up the task of proclaiming and preaching
the word of God in the *missio ad gentes* and in the most difficult situations, for being ever ready to adapt to new situations and for setting out courageously and boldly along fresh paths in meeting new challenges for the effective proclamation of God’s word.\[316\]

The laity are called to exercise their own prophetic role, which derives directly from their Baptism, and to bear witness to the Gospel in daily life, wherever they find themselves. In this regard the Synod Fathers expressed “the greatest esteem, gratitude and encouragement for the service to evangelization which so many of the lay faithful, and women in particular, provide with generosity and commitment in their communities throughout the world, following the example of Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the joy of Easter”.\[317\] The Synod also recognized with gratitude that the ecclesial movements and the new communities are a great force for evangelization in our times and an incentive to the development of new ways of proclaiming the Gospel.\[318\]

*The necessity of the “missio ad gentes”*

In calling upon all the faithful to proclaim God’s word, the Synod Fathers restated the need in our day too for a decisive commitment to the *missio ad gentes*. In no way can the Church restrict her pastoral work to the “ordinary maintenance” of those who already know the Gospel of Christ. Missionary outreach is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community. The Fathers also insisted that the word of God is the saving truth which men and women in every age need to hear. For this reason, it must be explicitly proclaimed. The Church must go out to meet each person in the strength of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:5) and continue her prophetic defense of people’s right and freedom to hear the word of God, while constantly seeking out the most effective ways of proclaiming that word, even at the risk of persecution.\[319\] The Church feels duty-bound to proclaim to every man and woman the word that saves (cf. Rom 1:14).

*Proclamation and the new evangelization*

Pope John Paul II, taking up the prophetic words of Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, had in a variety of ways reminded the faithful of the need for a new missionary season for the entire people of God.\[320\] At the dawn of the third millennium not only are there
still many peoples who have not come to know the Good News, but also a
great many Christians who need to have the word of God once more
persuasively proclaimed to them, so that they can concretely experience the
power of the Gospel. Many of our brothers and sisters are “baptized, but
insufficiently evangelized”. In a number of cases, nations once rich in
faith and in vocations are losing their identity under the influence of a
secularized culture. The need for a new evangelization, so deeply felt by
my venerable Predecessor, must be valiantly reaffirmed, in the certainty
that God’s word is effective. The Church, sure of her Lord’s fidelity, never
tires of proclaiming the good news of the Gospel and invites all Christians
to discover anew the attraction of following Christ.

The word of God and Christian witness

The immense horizons of the Church’s mission and the complexity of
today’s situation call for new ways of effectively communicating the word of
God. The Holy Spirit, the protagonist of all evangelization, will never fail
to guide Christ’s Church in this activity. Yet it is important that every form
of proclamation keep in mind, first of all, the intrinsic relationship between
the communication of God’s word and Christian witness. The very
credibility of our proclamation depends on this. On the one hand, the word
must communicate every-thing that the Lord himself has told us. On the
other hand, it is indispensable, through witness, to make this word
credible, lest it appear merely as a beautiful philosophy or utopia, rather
than a reality that can be lived and itself give life. This reciprocity between
word and witness reflects the way in which God himself communicated
through the incarnation of his Word. The word of God reaches men and
women “through an encounter with witnesses who make it present and
alive”. In a particular way, young people need to be introduced to the
word of God “through encounter and authentic witness by adults, through
the positive influence of friends and the great company of the ecclesial
community”.

There is a close relationship between the testimony of Scripture, as the
self-attestation of God’s word, and the witness given by the lives of
believers. One implies and leads to the other. Christian witness
communicates the word attested in the Scriptures. For their part, the
Scriptures explain the witness which Christians are called to give by their
lives. Those who encounter credible witnesses of the Gospel thus come to realize how effective God’s word can be in those who receive it.

In this interplay between witness and word we can understand what Pope Paul VI stated in the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi. Our responsibility is not limited to suggesting shared values to the world; rather, we need to arrive at an explicit proclamation of the word of God. Only in this way will we be faithful to Christ’s mandate: “The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization unless the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are proclaimed”.

The fact that the proclamation of the word of God calls for the testimony of one’s life is a datum clearly present in the Christian consciousness from the beginning. Christ himself is the faithful and true witness (cf. Acts 1:5; 3:14), it is he who testifies to the Truth (cf. Jn 18:37). Here I would like to echo the countless testimonials which we had the grace of hearing during the synodal assembly. We were profoundly moved to hear the stories of those who lived their faith and bore outstanding witness to the Gospel even under regimes hostile to Christianity or in situations of persecution.

None of this should cause us fear. Jesus himself said to his disciples: “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (Jn 15:20). For this reason I would like, with the whole Church, to lift up to God a hymn of praise for the witness of our many faithful brothers and sisters who, even in our day, have given their lives to communicate the truth of God’s love revealed to us in the crucified and risen Christ. I also express the whole Church’s gratitude for those Christians who have not yielded in the face of obstacles and even persecutions for the sake of the Gospel. We likewise embrace with deep fraternal affection the faithful of all those Christian communities, particularly in Asia and in Africa, who presently risk their life or social segregation because of their faith. Here we encounter the true spirit of the Gospel, which proclaims blessed those who are persecuted on account of the Lord Jesus (cf. Mt 5:11). In so doing, we once more call upon the
governments of nations to guarantee everyone freedom of conscience and
religion, as well as the ability to express their faith publicly.[326]

The Word of God

And Commitment in the World

Serving Jesus in “the least of his brethren” (Mt 25:40)

The word of God sheds light on human existence and stirs our
conscience to take a deeper look at our lives, inasmuch as all human history
stands under God’s judgment: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory,
and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before
him will be gathered all the nations” (Mt 25:31-32). Nowadays we tend to
halt in a superficial way before the importance of the passing moment, as if
it had nothing to do with the future. The Gospel, on the other hand,
reminds us that every moment of our life is important and must be lived
intensely, in the knowledge that everyone will have to give an account of
his or her life. In the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, the
Son of Man considers whatever we do or do not do to “the least of his
brethren” (cf. 25:40, 45) as done or not done to himself: “I was hungry and
you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger
and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you
visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (25:35-36). The word of
God itself emphasizes the need for our engagement in the world and our
responsibility before Christ, the Lord of history. As we proclaim the
Gospel, let us encourage one another to do good and to commit ourselves
to justice, reconciliation and peace.

The word of God and commitment to justice in society

God’s word inspires men and women to build relationships based on
rectitude and justice, and testifies to the great value in God’s eyes of every
effort to create a more just and more liveable world.[327] The word of God
itself unambiguously denounces injustices and promotes solidarity and
equality.[328] In the light of the Lord’s words, let us discern the “signs of the
times” present in history, and not flee from a commitment to those who
suffer and the victims of forms of selfishness.
The Synod recalled that a commitment to justice and to changing our world is an essential element of evangelization. In the words of Pope Paul VI, we must “reach and as it were overturn with the force of the Gospel the standards of judgment, the interests, the thought-patterns, the sources of inspiration and life-styles of humanity that are in contrast with the word of God and with his plan for salvation”.[329]

For this reason, the Synod Fathers wished to say a special word to all those who take part in political and social life. Evangelization and the spread of God’s word ought to inspire their activity in the world, as they work for the true common good in respecting and promoting the dignity of every person. Certainly it is not the direct task of the Church to create a more just society, although she does have the right and duty to intervene on ethical and moral issues related to the good of individuals and peoples. It is primarily the task of the lay faithful, formed in the school of the Gospel, to be directly involved in political and social activity. For this reason, the Synod recommends that they receive a suitable formation in the principles of the Church’s social teaching.[330]

I would like also to call the attention of everyone to the importance of defending and promoting the human rights of every person, based on the natural law written on the human heart, which, as such, are “universal, inviolable and inalienable”. [331] The Church expresses the hope that by the recognition of these rights human dignity will be more effectively acknowledged and universally promoted,[332] inasmuch as it is a distinctive mark imprinted by the Creator on his creatures, taken up and redeemed by Jesus Christ through his incarnation, death and resurrection. The spread of the word of God cannot fail to strengthen the recognition of, and respect for, the human rights of every person.[333]

The proclamation of God’s word, reconciliation and peace between peoples

Among the many areas where commitment is needed, the Synod earnestly called for the promotion of reconciliation and peace. In the present context it is more necessary than ever to rediscover the word of God as a source of reconciliation and peace, since in that word God is reconciling to himself all things (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 1:10): Christ “is our peace” (Eph 2:14), the one who breaks down the walls of division. A
number of interventions at the Synod documented the grave and violent conflicts and tensions present on our planet. At times these hostilities seem to take on the appearance of interreligious conflict. Here I wish to affirm once more that religion can never justify intolerance or war. We cannot kill in God’s name![334] Each religion must encourage the right use of reason and promote ethical values that consolidate civil coexistence.

In fidelity to the work of reconciliation accomplished by God in Jesus Christ crucified and risen, Catholics and men and women of goodwill must commit themselves to being an example of reconciliation for the building of a just and peaceful society.[335] We should never forget that “where human words become powerless because the tragic clash of violence and arms prevails, the prophetic power of God’s word does not waver, reminding us that peace is possible and that we ourselves must be instruments of reconciliation and peace”.[336]

The word of God and practical charity

Commitment to justice, reconciliation and peace finds its ultimate foundation and fulfillment in the love revealed to us in Christ. By listening to the testimonies offered during the Synod, we saw more clearly the bond between a love-filled hearing of God’s word and selfless service of our brothers and sisters; all believers should see the need to “translate the word that we have heard into gestures of love, because this is the only way to make the Gospel proclamation credible, despite the human weakness that marks individuals”.[337] Jesus passed through this world doing good (cf. Acts 10:38). Listening with docility to the word of God in the Church awakens “charity and justice towards all, especially towards the poor”. [338] We should never forget that “love — caritas — will always prove necessary, even in the most just society … whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such”.[339] I therefore encourage the faithful to meditate often on the Apostle Paul’s hymn to charity and to draw inspiration from it: “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but delights in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Cor 13:4-8).
Love of neighbor, rooted in the love of God, ought to see us constantly committed as individuals and as an ecclesial community, both local and universal. As Saint Augustine says: “It is essential to realize that love is the fullness of the Law, as it is of all the divine Scriptures … Whoever claims to have understood the Scriptures, or any part of them, without striving as a result to grow in this twofold love of God and neighbor, makes it clear that he has not yet understood them”.[340]

**The proclamation of the word of God and young people**

The Synod paid particular attention to the proclamation of God’s word to the younger generation. Young people are already active members of the Church and they represent its future. Often we encounter in them a spontaneous openness to hearing the word of God and a sincere desire to know Jesus. Youth is a time when genuine and irrepressible questions arise about the meaning of life and the direction our own lives should take. Only God can give the true answer to these questions. Concern for young people calls for courage and clarity in the message we proclaim; we need to help young people to gain confidence and familiarity with sacred Scripture so it can become a compass pointing out the path to follow.[341] Young people need witnesses and teachers who can walk with them, teaching them to love the Gospel and to share it, especially with their peers, and thus to become authentic and credible messengers.[342]

God’s word needs to be presented in a way that brings out its implications for each person’s vocation and assists young people in choosing the direction they will give to their lives, including that of total consecration to God.[343] Authentic vocations to the consecrated life and to the priesthood find fertile ground in a faith-filled contact with the word of God. I repeat once again the appeal I made at the beginning of my pontificate to open wide the doors to Christ: “If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. … Dear young people: do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ — and you will find true life”.[344]
The proclamation of the word of God and migrants

The word of God makes us attentive to history and to emerging realities. In considering the Church’s mission of evangelization, the Synod thus decided to address as well the complex phenomenon of movements of migration, which in recent years have taken on unprecedented proportions. This issue is fraught with extremely delicate questions about the security of nations and the welcome to be given to those seeking refuge or improved conditions of living, health and work. Large numbers of people who know nothing of Christ, or who have an inadequate understanding of him, are settling in countries of Christian tradition. At the same time, persons from nations deeply marked by Christian faith are emigrating to countries where Christ needs to be proclaimed and a new evangelization is demanded. These situations offer new possibilities for the spread of God’s word. In this regard the Synod Fathers stated that migrants are entitled to hear the $\textit{kerygma}$, which is to be proposed, not imposed. If they are Christians, they require forms of pastoral care which can enable them to grow in the faith and to become in turn messengers of the Gospel. Taking into account the complexity of the phenomenon, a mobilization of all dioceses involved is essential, so that movements of migration will also be seen as an opportunity to discover new forms of presence and proclamation. It is also necessary that they ensure, to the extent possible, that these our brothers and sisters receive adequate welcome and attention, so that, touched by the Good News, they will be able to be heralds of God’s word and witnesses to the Risen Jesus, the hope of the world.$^{[345]}$

The proclamation of the word of God and the suffering

During the work of the Synod, the Fathers also considered the need to proclaim God’s word to all those who are suffering, whether physically, psychologically or spiritually. It is in times of pain that the ultimate questions about the meaning of one’s life make themselves acutely felt. If human words seem to fall silent before the mystery of evil and suffering, and if our society appears to value life only when it corresponds to certain standards of efficiency and well-being, the word of God makes us see that even these moments are mysteriously “embraced” by God’s love. Faith born of an encounter with God’s word helps us to realize that human life deserves to be lived fully, even when weakened by illness and pain. God
created us for happiness and for life, whereas sickness and death came into the world as a result of sin (cf. Wis 2:23-24). Yet the Father of life is mankind’s physician *par excellence*, and he does not cease to bend lovingly over suffering humanity. We contemplate the culmination of God’s closeness to our sufferings in Jesus himself, “the Word incarnate. He suffered and died for us. By his passion and death he took our weakness upon himself and totally transformed it”.[346]

Jesus’ closeness to those who suffer is constant: it is prolonged in time thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the Church, in the word and in the sacraments, in men and women of good will, and in charitable initiatives undertaken with fraternal love by communities, thus making known God’s true face and his love. The Synod thanked God for the luminous witness, often hidden, of all the many Christians — priests, religious and lay faithful — who have lent and continue to lend their hands, eyes and hearts to Christ, the true physician of body and soul. It exhorts all to continue to care for the infirm and to bring them the life-giving presence of the Lord Jesus in the word and in the Eucharist. Those who suffer should be helped to read the Scriptures and to realize that their condition itself enables them to share in a special way in Christ’s redemptive suffering for the salvation of the world (cf. 2 Cor 4:8-11,14).[347]

*The proclamation of the word of God and the poor*

Sacred Scripture manifests God’s special love for the poor and the needy (cf. Mt 25:31-46). The Synod Fathers frequently spoke of the importance of enabling these, our brothers and sisters, to hear the Gospel message and to experience the closeness of their pastors and communities. Indeed, “the poor are the first ones entitled to hear the proclamation of the Gospel; they need not only bread, but also words of life”. [348] The *diaconia* of charity, which must never be lacking in our churches, should always be bound to the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacred mysteries.[349] Yet we also need to recognize and appreciate the fact that the poor are themselves agents of evangelization. In the Bible, the true poor are those who entrust themselves totally to God; in the Gospel Jesus calls them blessed, “for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5:3; cf. Lk 6:20). The Lord exalts the simplicity of heart of those who find in God
true riches, placing their hope in him, and not in the things of this world. The Church cannot let the poor down: “Pastors are called to listen to them, to learn from them, to guide them in their faith and to encourage them to take responsibility for lives”.[350]

The Church also knows that poverty can exist as a virtue, to be cultivated and chosen freely, as so many saints have done. Poverty can likewise exist as indigence, often due to injustice or selfishness, marked by hunger and need, and as a source of conflict. In her proclamation of God’s word, the Church knows that a “virtuous circle” must be promoted between the poverty which is to be chosen and the poverty which is to be combated; we need to rediscover “moderation and solidarity, these values of the Gospel that are also universal … This entails decisions marked by justice and moderation”.[351]

The proclamation of the word of God and the protection of creation

Engagement with the world, as demanded by God’s word, makes us look with new eyes at the entire created cosmos, which contains traces of that word through whom all things were made (cf. Jn 1:2). As men and women who believe in and proclaim the Gospel, we have a responsibility towards creation. Revelation makes known God’s plan for the cosmos, yet it also leads us to denounce that mistaken attitude which refuses to view all created realities as a reflection of their Creator, but instead as mere raw material, to be exploited without scruple. Man thus lacks that essential humility which would enable him to see creation as a gift from God, to be received and used in accordance with his plan. Instead, the arrogance of human beings who live “as if God did not exist” leads them to exploit and disfigure nature, failing to see it as the handiwork of the creative word. In this theological context, I would like to echo the statements of the Synod Fathers who reminded us that “accepting the word of God, attested to by Scripture and by the Church’s living Tradition, gives rise to a new way of seeing things, promotes an authentic ecology which has its deepest roots in the obedience of faith … [and] develops a renewed theological sensitivity to the goodness of all things, which are created in Christ”. [352] We need to be re-educated in wonder and in the ability to recognize the beauty made manifest in created realities.[353]
The Word of God and Culture

The value of culture for the life of humanity

Saint John’s proclamation that the Word became flesh reveals the inseparable bond between God’s word and the human words by which he communicates with us. In this context the Synod Fathers considered the relationship between the word of God and culture. God does not reveal himself in the abstract, but by using languages, imagery and expressions that are bound to different cultures. This relationship has proved fruitful, as the history of the Church abundantly testifies. Today it is entering a new phase due to the spread of the Gospel and its taking root within different cultures, as well as more recent developments in the culture of the West. It calls in the first place for a recognition of the importance of culture as such for the life of every man and woman. The phenomenon of culture is, in its various aspects, an essential datum of human experience. “Man lives always according to a culture which is properly his, and which in turn creates among persons a bond which is properly theirs, one which determines the inter-human and social character of human existence”.[354]

Down the centuries the word of God has inspired different cultures, giving rise to fundamental moral values, outstanding expressions of art and exemplary life-styles.[355] Hence, in looking to a renewed encounter between the Bible and culture, I wish to reassure all those who are part of the world of culture that they have nothing to fear from openness to God’s word, which never destroys true culture, but rather is a constant stimulus to seek ever more appropriate, meaningful and humane forms of expression. Every authentic culture, if it is truly to be at the service of humanity, has to be open to transcendence and, in the end, to God.

The Bible, a great code for cultures

The Synod Fathers greatly stressed the importance of promoting a suitable knowledge of the Bible among those engaged in the area of culture, also in secularized contexts and among non-believers.[356] Sacred Scripture contains anthropological and philosophical values that have had a positive influence on humanity as a whole.[357] A sense of the Bible as a great code for cultures needs to be fully recovered.
Knowledge of the Bible in schools and universities

One particular setting for an encounter between the word of God and culture is that of schools and universities. Pastors should be especially attentive to this milieu, promoting a deeper knowledge of the Bible and a grasp of its fruitful cultural implications also for the present day. Study centers supported by Catholic groups offer a distinct contribution to the promotion of culture and education — and this ought to be recognized. Nor must religious education be neglected, and religion teachers should be given careful training. Religious education is often the sole opportunity available for students to encounter the message of faith. In the teaching of religion, emphasis should be laid on knowledge of sacred Scripture, as a means of overcoming prejudices old and new, and enabling its truth to be better known.\(^{[358]}\)

Sacred Scripture in the variety of artistic expressions

The relationship between the word of God and culture has found expression in many areas, especially in the arts. For this reason the great tradition of East and West has always esteemed works of art inspired by sacred Scripture, as for example the figurative arts and architecture, literature and music. I think too of the ancient language expressed by icons, which from the Eastern tradition is gradually spreading throughout the world. With the Synod Fathers, the whole Church expresses her appreciation, esteem and admiration of those artists “enamoured of beauty” who have drawn inspiration from the sacred texts. They have contributed to the decoration of our churches, to the celebration of our faith, to the enrichment of our liturgy and many of them have helped to make somehow perceptible, in time and space, realities that are unseen and eternal.\(^{[359]}\) I encourage the competent offices and groups to promote in the Church a solid formation of artists with regard to sacred Scripture in the light of the Church’s living Tradition and her magisterium.

The word of God and the means of social communication

Linked to the relationship between the word of God and culture is the need for a careful and intelligent use of the communications media, both old and new. The Synod Fathers called for a proper knowledge of these media; they noted their rapid development and different levels of
interaction, and asked for greater efforts to be made in gaining expertise in
the various sectors involved, particularly in the new media, such as the
internet. The Church already has a significant presence in the world of
mass communications, and her magisterium has frequently intervened on
the subject, beginning with the Second Vatican Council. Discovering
new methods of transmitting the Gospel message is part of the continuing
evangelizing outreach of those who believe. Communications today take
place through a worldwide network, and thus give new meaning to Christ’s
words: “What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear
whispered, proclaim upon the housetops” (Mt 10:27). God’s word should
resound not only in the print media, but in other forms of communication
as well. For this reason, together with the Synod Fathers, I express
gratitude to those Catholics who are making serious efforts to promote a
significant presence in the world of the media, and I ask for an ever wider
and more qualified commitment in this regard.

Among the new forms of mass communication, nowadays we need to
recognize the increased role of the internet, which represents a new forum
for making the Gospel heard. Yet we also need to be aware that the virtual
world will never be able to replace the real world, and that evangelization
will be able to make use of the virtual world offered by the new media in
order to create meaningful relationships only if it is able to offer the
personal contact which remains indispensable. In the world of the internet,
which enables billions of images to appear on millions of screens
throughout the world, the face of Christ needs to be seen and his voice
heard, for “if there is no room for Christ, there is no room for man.”

The Bible and inculturation

The mystery of the incarnation tells us that while God always
communicates in a concrete history, taking up the cultural codes embedded
therein, the same word can and must also be passed on in different
cultures, transforming them from within through what Pope Paul VI called
the evangelization of cultures. The word of God, like the Christian
faith itself, has a profoundly intercultural character; it is capable of
encountering different cultures and in turn enabling them to encounter one
another.
Here too we come to appreciate the importance of the inculturation of the Gospel. The Church is firmly convinced that the word of God is inherently capable of speaking to all human persons in the context of their own culture: “this conviction springs from the Bible itself, which, right from the Book of Genesis, adopts a universalist stance (cf. Gen 1:27-28), maintains it subsequently in the blessing promised to all peoples through Abraham and his offspring (cf. Gen 12:3; 18:18), and confirms it definitively in extending to ‘all nations’ the proclamation of the Gospel”. For this reason, inculturation is not to be confused with processes of superficial adaptation, much less with a confused syncretism which would dilute the uniqueness of the Gospel in an attempt to make it more easily accepted. The authentic paradigm of inculturation is the incarnation itself of the Word: “‘Acculturation’ or ‘inculturation’ will truly be a reflection of the incarnation of the Word when a culture, transformed and regenerated by the Gospel, brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought”, serving as a leaven within the local culture, enhancing the *semina Verbi* and all those positive elements present within that culture, thus opening it to the values of the Gospel.

*Translating the Bible and making it more widely available*

The inculturation of God’s word is an integral part of the Church’s mission in the world, and a decisive moment in this process is the diffusion of the Bible through the precious work of translation into different languages. Here it should always be remembered that the work of translation of the Scriptures had been undertaken “already in the Old Testament period, when the Hebrew text of the Bible was translated orally into Aramaic (Neh 8:8,12) and later in written form into Greek. A translation, of course, is always more than a simple transcription of the original texts. The passage from one language to another necessarily involves a change of cultural context: concepts are not identical and symbols have a different meaning, for they come up against other traditions of thought and other ways of life.”

During the Synod, it was clear that a number of local Churches still lack a complete translation of the Bible in their own languages. How many people today hunger and thirst for the word of God, yet remain deprived of
the “widely available access to Sacred Scripture”[372] desired by the Second Vatican Council! For this reason the Synod considered it important, above all, to train specialists committed to translating the Bible into the various languages.[373] I would encourage the investment of resources in this area. In particular I wish to recommend supporting the work of the Catholic Biblical Federation, with the aim of further increasing the number of translations of sacred Scripture and their wide diffusion.[374] Given the very nature of such an enterprise, it should be carried out as much as possible in cooperation with the different Bible Societies.

*God’s word transcends cultural limits*

The synodal assembly, in its discussion of the relationship between God’s word and cultures, felt the need to reaffirm something that the earliest Christians had experienced beginning on the day of Pentecost (*Acts* 2:1-2). The word of God is capable of entering into and finding expression in various cultures and languages, yet that same word overcomes the limits of individual cultures to create fellowship between different peoples. The Lord’s word summons us to advance towards an ever more vast communion. “We escape the limitations of our experience and we enter into the reality that is truly universal. Entering into communion with the word of God, we enter into the communion of the Church which lives the word of God. … It means going beyond the limits of the individual cultures into the universality that connects all, unites all, makes us all brothers and sisters”.[375] The proclamation of God’s work thus always demands, of us in the first place, a new exodus, as we leave behind our own limited standards and imaginations in order to make room for the presence of Christ.

**The Word Of God**

**And Interreligious Dialogue**

*The value of interreligious dialogue*

The Church considers an essential part of the proclamation of the word to consist in encounter, dialogue and cooperation with all people of good will, particularly with the followers of the different religious traditions of humanity. This is to take place without forms of syncretism and relativism,
but along the lines indicated by the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Nostra Aetate* and subsequently developed by the magisterium of the Popes.[376] Nowadays the quickened pace of globalization makes it possible for people of different cultures and religions to be in closer contact. This represents a providential opportunity for demonstrating how authentic religiosity can foster relationships of universal fraternity. Today, in our frequently secularized societies, it is very important that the religions be capable of fostering a mentality that sees Almighty God as the foundation of all good, the inexhaustible source of the moral life, and the bulwark of a profound sense of universal brotherhood.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, one finds a moving witness to God’s love for all peoples: in the covenant with Noah he joins them in one great embrace symbolized by the “bow in the clouds” (*Gen* 9:13,14,16) and, according to the words of the prophets, he desires to gather them into a single universal family (cf. *Is* 2:2ff; 42:6; 66:18-21; *Jer* 4:2; *Ps* 47). Evidence of a close connection between a relationship with God and the ethics of love for everyone is found in many great religious traditions.

**Dialogue between Christians and Muslims**

Among the various religions the Church also looks with respect to Muslims, who adore the one God.[377] They look to Abraham and worship God above all through prayer, almsgiving and fasting. We acknowledge that the Islamic tradition includes countless biblical figures, symbols and themes. Taking up the efforts begun by the Venerable John Paul II, I express my hope that the trust-filled relationships established between Christians and Muslims over the years will continue to develop in a spirit of sincere and respectful dialogue.[378] In this dialogue the Synod asked for a deeper reflection on respect for life as a fundamental value, the inalienable rights of men and women, and their equal dignity. Taking into account the important distinction to be made between the socio-political order and the religious order, the various religions must make their specific contribution to the common good. The Synod asked Conferences of Bishops, wherever it is appropriate and helpful, to encourage meetings aimed at helping Christians and Muslims to come to better knowledge of
one another, in order to promote the values which society needs for a peaceful and positive coexistence.\[379\]

**Dialogue with other religions**

Here too I wish to voice the Church’s respect for the ancient religions and spiritual traditions of the various continents. These contain values which can greatly advance understanding between individuals and peoples.\[380\] Frequently we note a consonance with values expressed also in their religious books, such as, in Buddhism, respect for life, contemplation, silence, simplicity; in Hinduism, the sense of the sacred, sacrifice and fasting; and again, in Confucianism, family and social values. We are also gratified to find in other religious experiences a genuine concern for the transcendence of God, acknowledged as Creator, as well as respect for life, marriage and the family, and a strong sense of solidarity.

**Dialogue and religious freedom**

All the same, dialogue would not prove fruitful unless it included authentic respect for each person and the ability of all freely to practice their religion. Hence the Synod, while encouraging cooperation between the followers of the different religions, also pointed out “the need for the freedom to profess one’s religion, privately and publicly, and freedom of conscience to be effectively guaranteed to all believers”:\[381\] indeed, “respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom. Such respect and dialogue foster peace and understanding between peoples”.\[382\]

**CONCLUSION**

God’s definitive word

At the conclusion of these reflections with which I have sought to gather up and examine more fully the rich fruits of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the word of God in the life and mission of the Church, I wish once more to encourage all the People of God, pastors, consecrated persons and the laity, to become increasingly familiar with the sacred Scriptures. We must never forget that all authentic and living Christian spirituality is based on the word of God proclaimed, accepted, celebrated and meditated upon in the Church. This deepening
relationship with the divine word will take place with even greater enthusiasm if we are conscious that, in Scripture and the Church’s living Tradition, we stand before God’s definitive word on the cosmos and on history.

The Prologue of John’s Gospel leads us to ponder the fact that everything that exists is under the sign of the Word. The Word goes forth from the Father, comes to dwell in our midst and then returns to the Father in order to bring with him the whole of creation which was made in him and for him. The Church now carries out her mission in eager expectation of the eschatological manifestation of the Bridegroom: “the Spirit and the bride say: ‘Come!’” (Rev 22:17). This expectation is never passive; rather it is a missionary drive to proclaim the word of God which heals and redeems every man. Today too the Risen Jesus says to us: “Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15).

**New evangelization and a new hearing**

Our own time, then, must be increasingly marked by a new hearing of God’s word and a new evangelization. Recovering the centrality of the divine word in the Christian life leads us to appreciate anew the deepest meaning of the forceful appeal of Pope John Paul II: to pursue the *missio ad gentes* and vigorously to embark upon the new evangelization, especially in those nations where the Gospel has been forgotten or meets with indifference as a result of widespread secularism. May the Holy Spirit awaken a hunger and thirst for the word of God, and raise up zealous heralds and witnesses of the Gospel.

Following the example of the great Apostle of the Nations, who changed the course of his life after hearing the voice of the Lord (cf. Acts 9:1-30), let us too hear God’s word as it speaks to us, ever personally, here and now. The Holy Spirit, we are told in the Acts of the Apostles, set Paul and Barnabas apart to proclaim and spread the Good News (cf. 13:2). In our day too, the Holy Spirit constantly calls convinced and persuasive hearers and preachers of the word of the Lord.

**The word and joy**

The greater our openness to God’s word, the more will we be able to
recognize that today too the mystery of Pentecost is taking place in God’s Church. The Spirit of the Lord continues to pour out his gifts upon the Church to guide us into all truth, to show us the meaning of the Scriptures and to make us credible heralds of the word of salvation before the world. Thus we return to the First Letter of Saint John. In God’s word, we too have heard, we too have seen and touched the Word of life. We have welcomed by grace the proclamation that eternal life has been revealed, and thus we have come to acknowledge our fellowship with one another, with those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, and with all those who throughout the world hear the word, celebrate the Eucharist and by their lives bear witness to charity. This proclamation has been shared with us — the Apostle John reminds us — so that “our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:4).

The synodal assembly enabled us to experience all that Saint John speaks of: the proclamation of the word creates communion and brings about joy. This is a profound joy which has its origin in the very heart of the trinitarian life and which is communicated to us in the Son. This joy is an ineffable gift which the world cannot give. Celebrations can be organized, but not joy. According to the Scripture, joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22) who enables us to enter into the word and enables the divine word to enter into us and to bear fruit for eternal life. By proclaiming God’s word in the power of the Holy Spirit, we also wish to share the source of true joy, not a superficial and fleeting joy, but the joy born of the awareness that the Lord Jesus alone has words of everlasting life (cf. Jn 6:68).

“Mater Verbi et Mater laetitiae”

This close relationship between God’s word and joy is evident in the Mother of God. Let us recall the words of Saint Elizabeth: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (Lk 1:45). Mary is blessed because she has faith, because she believed, and in this faith she received the Word of God into her womb in order to give him to the world. The joy born of the Word can now expand to all those who, by faith, let themselves be changed by God’s word. The Gospel of Luke presents this mystery of hearing and joy in two texts. Jesus says: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God
and do it” (8:21). And in reply to a woman from the crowd who blesses the womb that bore him and the breasts that nursed him, Jesus reveals the secret of true joy: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!” (11:28). Jesus points out Mary’s true grandeur, making it possible for each of us to attain that blessedness which is born of the word received and put into practice. I remind all Christians that our personal and communal relationship with God depends on our growing familiarity with the word of God. Finally, I turn to every man and woman, including those who have fallen away from the Church, who have left the faith or who have never heard the proclamation of salvation. To everyone the Lord says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20).

May every day of our lives thus be shaped by a renewed encounter with Christ, the Word of the Father made flesh: he stands at the beginning and the end, and “in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17). Let us be silent in order to hear the Lord’s word and to meditate upon it, so that by the working of the Holy Spirit it may remain in our hearts and speak to us all the days of our lives. In this way the Church will always be renewed and rejuvenated, thanks to the word of the Lord which remains for ever (cf. 1 Pet 1:25; Is 40:8). Thus we too will enter into the great nuptial dialogue which concludes sacred Scripture: “The Spirit and the bride say: ‘Come’. And let everyone who hears say: ‘Come!’” The one who testifies to these things, says: ‘Surely I am coming soon!’. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:17, 20).

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 30 September, the Memorial of Saint Jerome, in the year 2010, the sixth of my Pontificate.


[5] Ibid.


[7] Ibid., 4


Cf. Relatio ante disceptationem, I.

Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 2.


Instrumentum Laboris, 9.

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: DS 150.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Homilia super missus est, IV, 11: PL 183, 86B.

Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 10.

Cf. Propositio 3.


Itinerarium mentis in Deum, II, 12: Opera Omnia V, Quaracchi 1891, pp. 302-303; cf. Commentarius in librum Ecclesiastes, Cap. 1, vers. 11; Quaestiones, II, 3: Opera Omnia VI, Quaracchi 1891, p. 16.


[28] Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 94, a. 2.


[42] *Proposito 4.*

[44] *Proposito* 47.


[52] *Epistula* 120, 10: CSEL 55, 500-506.


[57] Ibid., 8.

[58] Ibid.


*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 102; Cf. also Rupert of Deutz, *De Operibus Spiritus Sancti*, I, 6: SC 131:72-74.


Ibid., 9.


Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 12.


Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 11.

*Proposito* 4.

Prol: *Opera Omnia* V, Quaracchi 1891, pp. 201-202.


Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 5.

*Proposito* 4.


*Proposito* 55.


*Propositio* 55.


*Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 106, art. 2.

Pontifical biblical commission, The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (15 April 1993), III, A, 3: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 13, No. 3035.

Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 12.

*Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, V, 6: PL 42, 176.


*Commentariorum in Isaiam libri*, Prol.: PL 24, 17.


Ibid., II, A, 2: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 13, No. 2991.

*Homiliae in Ezechielem* I, VII, 8: PL 76, 843D.


[100] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 10.


[106] No. 12.


[109] Proposito 27.

[111] Cf. ibid.

[112] Ibid.


[120] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 116.

[121] Summa Theologiae, I, q. 1, art. 10, ad 1.

[122] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 118.


[124] Ibid., II, B, 2: Enchiridion Vaticum 13, No. 3003.


[126] Ibid.


[129] De Arca Noe, 2, 8: PL 176, 642C-D.


Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 121-122.

Propositio 52.


Catechism of the Catholic Church, 128.

Ibid., 129.

Propositio 52.

Quaestiones in Heptateuchum, 2, 73: PL 34, 623.

Homiliae in Ezechielem I, VI, 15: PL 76, 836B.

Propositio 29.


Cf. Propositiones 46 and 47.


Propositio 46.

Propositio 28.

Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 23.

It should be recalled, however, that with regard to the so-called deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament and their inspiration, Catholics and Orthodox do not have exactly the same biblical canon as Anglicans and Protestants.

Cf. Relatio post disceptationem, 36.

Propositio 36.


Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 21.

Cf. Propositio 36.

Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 10.


Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 10.

Ibid.

Cf. ibid., 24.

Cf. Propositio 22.

Cf. ibid., 24.

Saint Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job XXIV, VIII, 16: PL 76, 295.


[166] Rule, 73, 3: SC 182, 672.


[170] Order of Friars Preacher, First Constitutions or *Consuetudines*, II, XXXI.


[173] Ibid., Ms C, 35v.


[178] No. 1.


[183] Ibid., 7.

[185] Ibid, 9.

[186] Ibid., 3; cf. Lk 4:16-21; 24:25-35, 44-49.


[190] Ibid., III, B, 3: Enchiridion Vaticanum 13, No. 3056.

[191] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, 48, 51, 56; Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 21, 26; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church Ad Gentes, 6, 15; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests Presbyterorum Ordinis, 18; Decree on the Renewal of the Religious Life Perfectae Caritatis, 6. In the Church’s great Tradition we find significant expressions such as “Corpus Christi intelligitur etiam … Scriptura Dei” (“God’s Scripture is also understood as the Body of Christ”): Waltramus, De Unitate Ecclesiae Conservanda, 1, 14, ed. W. Schwenkenbecher, Hanoverae, 1883, p. 33; “The flesh of the Lord is true food and his blood true drink; this is the true good that is reserved for us in this present life, to nourish ourselves with his flesh and drink his blood, not only in the Eucharist but also in reading sacred Scripture. Indeed, true food and true drink is the word of God which we derive from the Scriptures”: Saint Jerome, Commentarius in Ecclesiasten, III: PL 23, 1092A.


[193] Ordo Lectionum Missae, 10.

[194] Ibid.


[203] *Proposito* 16.


[207] *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 55

[208] Ibid., 8.


[211] *Proposito* 15.

[212] Ibid.


[219] Ibid., 19.


[221] *Proposito* 19.

[222] Principles and Norms for the Liturgy of the Hours, III, 15.


[229] Ibid.


General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 56


Cf. ibid., 17.

*Proposito* 40.

Cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 309.


Cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 57.

*Proposito* 14.

Cf. Canon 36 of the Synod of Hippo, in the year 399: DS 186.


*Proposito* 9.

*Epistula* 30, 7: CSEL 54, p. 246.


Id., *Epistula* 107, 9, 12: CSEL 55, pp. 300, 302.


Saint Jerome, Commentariorum in Isaiah libri, Prol.: PL 24, 17B.

Propositio 21.

Cf. Propositio 23.


Ibid., 128: Enchiridion Vaticanum 16, No. 936.

Cf. Propositio 33.

Cf. Propositio 45.


Propositio 31.

No. 15: AAS 96 (2004), 846-847.

No. 26: AAS 84 (1992), 698.

Ibid.


Ibid., 356.


Ibid., 74: Enchiridion Vaticanum 17, No. 263.

Ibid., 81: Enchiridion Vaticanum 17, No. 271.
[273] Propositio 32.


[289] Propositio 17.

[290] Propositiones 9 and 22.
No. 25.

Enarrationes in Psalmos, 85, 7: PL 37, 1086.

Origen, Epistola ad Gregorium, 3: PG 11, 92.


Final Message, III, 9.

Ibid.

“Plenaria indulgentia conceditur christifidelis qui Sacram Scripturam, iuxta textum a competentii auctoritate adprobatum, cum veneratione divino eloquio debita et ad modum lectionis spiritualis, per dimidiam saltem horam legerit; si per minus tempus id egerit indulgentia erit partialis”: apostolic penitentiary, Enchiridion Indulgentiarum. Normae et Concessiones (16 July 1999), 30, §1.

Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1471-1479.


Cf. Epistula 49, 3: PL 16, 1204A.


Cf. Propositio 55.


Propositio 55.

Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. Principles and
Orientations (17 December 2001), 207: Enchiridion Vaticanum 20, Nos. 2656-2657.


[315] Propositio 38.


[321] Propositio 38.

Proposito 38.

Final Message, IV, 12.


Cf. Proposito 39.


Cf. Proposito 39.


Cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 152-159.


Cf. Proposito 8.


Id., Homily at the Conclusion of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (26 October 2008): AAS 100 (2008), 779.

Proposito 11.


[342] Cf. Propositio 34.

[343] Cf. ibid.


[348] Propositio 11.


[350] Propositio 11.


[352] Propositio 54.


[356] Cf. ibid.


[362] Cf. Propositio 44.


[373] Cf. Proposito 42.


[375] Benedict XVI, Homily during the Celebration of Terce at the beginning of the First General Congregation of the Synod of Bishops (6 October 2008): AAS 100 (2008), 760.


[381] Ibid..

PRELATE

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New Circumscription

On October 12, 2010, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, divided the Delegation of Southeast Asia (Asiae Meridionalis Orientalis), which will now be called East Asia, which makes up the territory of Hong Kong, Macao, Canton, Taiwan, and Korea; and has established the Delegation of Southeast Asia, with its seat in Singapore, on which depend Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, by means of the following decree:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
DECRETUM
Perspecto n. 152, §2 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei.

Quo aptius provideatur curæ laboris apostolici Prælaturæ, auditis Consilio Generali et Assesoratu Centrali, detracta parte territorii quæ ad interim ad Delegationem Asiae Meridionalis Orientalis pertinebat, decreto hoc nostro:

Statuimus ut praedicta haec Delegatio posthac vocetur Asiae Orientalis et territoria complectatur Sciiamchiameni (Hong Kong), Macai, Coamceuvæ (Canton), Taivaniæ et Coreæ.

Pariterque,

Novam erigimus Praelaturæ circumscriptionem, nempe Delegationem Asiae Meridionalis Orientalis a Nobis dependentem, quæ Singaporis, Malesiæ et Thailandiæ territoria comprehendat.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiae, die 12 mense octobri anno 2010.

✠ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Appointments

By the following decree, dated October 12, 2010, Bishop Javier Echevarría has appointed Rev. Avellino, Marín Orenes, as Delegate Vicar of the new Delegation of Southeast Asia.

Nos Dr.D.XAVERIUS ECHEVARRIA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
D E C R E T U M
Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Avellinum Marín Orenes, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Delegationone Asiac Meridionalis Orientalis, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.
Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad
suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in
Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.
Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiae Prælatitiae, die 12 mense octobri anno 2010.
✠ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Praelatus Operis Dei
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælatitiae Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 39
You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

Activities of the Prelate

Reunion in Rome with the Vicars of the Regions and Delegations (December 1 to 11, 2010)

From the 1st to the 11th of December, the Prelate and the Vicars of the various circumscriptions of the Prelature (Regions and Delegations) held working sessions in Rome.

Pastoral Trips
The prelate of Opus Dei in July made a pastoral trip to three countries in South America: Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil.

He spent July 6 to 11 in Ecuador, where he was received by the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Giacomo Guido Ottonello, and by Archbishop Raul Vela of Quito, together with his auxiliary bishops. During those days he also visited the sites of various apostolic works promoted by people of Opus Dei and cooperators in Quito and Guayaquil, and held get-togethers with faithful of the Prelature and other groups of people.

In Quito he visited the Basilica of the National Vow, a neo-Gothic Church that includes a chapel dedicated to St. Josemaría. In Guayaquil, in addition to greeting Archbishop Antonio Arregui, he received various families, as he did in Quito, and prayed for some minutes in the cathedral before the tomb of the previous Archbishop, Juan Larrea Holguín, whose cause of canonization has been opened.

In Peru, from July 11 to 17, the Prelate visited Lima, Cañete and Piura. The day following his arrival, the Archbishop of Lima, Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani, and his auxiliary bishops received him at the Cathedral.

In San Vicente de Cañete, on the 13th, he went to the Shrine to our Mother of Fairest Love, where some five thousand people had come to see him. The Mayor, Jose Espinoza, welcomed in the name of the community and thanked him for the work that Opus Dei has carried out there for more than 40 years. He also gave him the keys to the city and granted him the honorary title of Illustrious Guest of the Province of Cañete. Bishop Echevarría, in his address, recalled the beginnings of the apostolic work in the region and especially the first Prelate of Yauyos, Cañete, and Huarochiri, Bishop Ignacio de Orbegozo. Afterward he entered into a direct dialogue with those present and answered their questions; he spoke about the sanctification of work and of the importance of caring for little things out of love for God.

In the evening, Bishop Echevarría visited Condoray, a corporate work of Opus Dei that fosters the human, social and spiritual development of
women from the Valle of Cañete. He blessed an image of Our Lady of Fairest Love and greeted the teachers, rural promoters and students at the Center, and was presented with some gifts brought by farmwomen from various parts of the valley. He also received greetings from the families and children who awaited him in a festive fashion in the different localities that he passed through along the Southern Pan-American Highway.

The Prelate was in Piura on July 15. After greeting Archbishop Jose Antonio Eguren, he went to the campus of the University, of which he is the Chancellor. There he had a meeting with students and families from the city.

Returning to Lima on the evening of the 16th, Bishop Echevarría visited the Salcantay and Alpamayo schools, and greeted the children at the Torrecillas pre-school center. In Alpamayo he had a get-together with more than eight thousand people, in the course of which he asked for prayers for Benedict XVI and spoke to parents, among other things, about the importance of teaching their children temperance.

From July 17 to 22, the Prelate visited Brazil. More than five thousand people from various Brazilian cities participated in the catechetical gathering held on Sunday the 18th in the Credicard Hall auditorium in São Paulo.

Back in Europe, at the end of August he made a quick two-day trip to Poland. Invited by Bishop Andrezej Wojciech Suski, in Torun, the birthplace of Copernicus, he took part on the 27th in a ceremony naming a church for St. Josemaría.

In October, from the 22nd to the 24th, he traveled to Pamplona to take part in the commemorative acts of the Golden Anniversary of the Association of Friends of the University of Navarra. On the esplanade of the university library, he celebrated a Mass attended by some four thousand
people. It was at this same place that St. Josemaría, also at a Mass for Friends of the University, gave the homily Passionately Loving the World, on October 8, 1967.

A month later he traveled from Rome to Portugal, to pray before our Lady of Fatima on November 22. On the following day, he made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, in the Jubilee Year. At both places, as he had done earlier in Poland, Torreciudad and Pamplona, he held get-togethers with faithful of Opus Dei and with other people who wanted to hear his priestly and fatherly words.

From December 17 to 19, Bishop Echevarría was in Bucharest, as he mentioned in his Letter of January 1, 2011: “I would like to share with you my joy from my trip to Bucharest, in Romania, before Christmas. The people of the Work there are joyfully confronting the difficulties that come from the lack of space and the minimum of comfort needed, as our Father stressed, basing himself on the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. And this has resulted in a lot of fruit for souls. I was there only two days, very intense ones, during which I could touch with my hands, once more, how the spirit of Opus Dei is taking root in places of very diverse cultures and traditions.”

Administration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders

Priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature

On Sunday, September 5, in Torreciudad, Spain, Bishop Echevarría conferred priestly ordination on two deacons of the Prelature: Josep Maria Viñolas, an agricultural technical engineer, and the Mexican computer scientist Mario Vera. Thanks to the Beta Films Foundation, the ceremony could be followed directly on the internet.

Diaconal ordination of faithful of the Prelature
Thirty-four faithful of the Prelature (from Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Singapore, Argentina, Colombia, Nigeria, the United States, France, Austria, Brazil, Mexico, El Salvador, Poland and Uganda) received diaconal ordination from the hands of Bishop Echeverría on November 13. The ceremony took place at St. Eugene’s Basilica, in Rome.

Pastoral Letters

Letter of December 2010

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

It makes me very happy to recall the joy with which St. Josemaría repeated, during the time of Advent, the words from the liturgy: *Dominus prope est*.[1] He looked forward, with eagerness and gratitude, to the solemnity that commemorates the Savior’s arrival on earth.

We have begun the time that helps us to prepare for Christmas and the other feasts connected with the birth of our Lord. I think that there will come to our lips the words of the prophet Isaiah, which are found in the Mass for the first Sunday: It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.[2] And we will be amazed at the goodness of Heaven, in seeing how this prophecy was fulfilled when the divine Word took flesh in the virginal womb of Mary Most Holy, by the working of the Holy Spirit. With his redemptive incarnation, and especially by the Paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, God has brought his peace to the world, as the angels announced at the first Christmas. And although this peace is not yet fully a reality (since in God’s plans it is only at the end of time that he will be everything to every one[3]), he has already made the wall disappear that was raised between mankind and God as the result of original sin and our
Besides, Jesus wants us Christians to assist him every day in implanting his peace in the hearts of men and women, reaching the furthest corner of society.

The Pope pointed out, several years ago, that “the Fathers of the Church, in their Greek translation of the Old Testament, found a passage from the prophet Isaiah that Paul also quotes in order to show how God’s new ways had already been foretold in the Old Testament. There we read: ‘God made his Word short, he abbreviated it’ (Is 10:23; Rom 9:28)... The Son himself is the Word, the Logos. The eternal Word became small—small enough to fit into a manger. He became a child, so that the Word could be grasped by us.” And in his recent Apostolic Exhortation the Holy Father added: “Now the Word is not simply audible; not only does it have a voice, now the Word has a face, one which we can see: that of Jesus of Nazareth.”

Let us continue, then, on our Christian path with confidence and great joy. “Christmas reminds us that our Lord is the beginning and the end and the center of creation: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1:1). It is Christ, my daughters and sons, who draws all creatures to himself: all things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that has been made (Jn 1:3). On becoming flesh, and coming to live among us (cf. Jn 1:14), He has shown us that we are not in this life to seek a temporal, passing happiness. We are here to reach eternal happiness, following in his footsteps. And we will only attain this by learning from Him.”

We have been re-clothed in Christ at Baptism. In order to conform ourselves ever more closely to him, our Lord left us the other sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist. By receiving them frequently and with the required dispositions, our resemblance to Jesus is strengthened; we are made better children of God. The Holy Spirit carries out this work in souls, counting on our personal cooperation. And part of this cooperation involves the assiduous reading of the Word of God, which is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hence the advice of our Father: “In our own life we must reproduce Christ’s life. We need to come to know him by reading...
and meditating on Scripture, and by praying.”[9] Let us make an effort during the upcoming feast days “to learn the lessons which Jesus teaches us, even when he is just a newly born Child, from the very moment he opens his eyes on this blessed land of men.”[10] Let us consider frequently: Do I have recourse to the sources of grace with a real zeal for holiness? Am I striving to be punctual in the reception of the sacraments, with an eagerness to acquire the purity of soul and supernatural tone that God expects of me?

The recent Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father, *Verbum Domini*, stresses the importance of Holy Scripture in the Church’s life and mission, and in the personal life of every Christian. There Benedict XVI reminds students of Sacred Scripture, and everyone, of a fundamental point: “the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church.”[11] Only in the heart of the Church, in continuity with the living Tradition and under the guidance of the Magisterium instituted by Christ, can we adequately understand what the Holy Spirit wishes to communicate to us for our salvation, by means of the inspired writers, making use of human words. In other words, it is only in the faith and from the faith that we can understand with depth and exactitude, without danger of error, what God has revealed to us, in order to let us share in the divine Life. The scientific study of Sacred Scripture is necessary for a sound exegesis; but equally necessary—and to a greater degree—is full identification with the faith set forth by the Magisterium of the Church. Therefore “an authentic interpretation of the Bible must always be in harmony with the faith of the Catholic Church.”[12]

To understand the Word of God well, besides stirring up our faith, we have to strive to read and meditate on the Bible in the spiritual climate in which it was written. Therefore in reading the Gospel and the other inspired books carefully, we need to foster an attitude of listening. Sacred Scripture, above all when it is proclaimed within the liturgical celebration, is always timely, and transmits the newness of God’s truth to the specific person who is listening to it attentively and who wants to assimilate it. Its words, as St. Josemaría wrote, are “light from the Holy Spirit, who speaks through human voices so as to make our intellect come to know and contemplate, to strengthen our will and make our desire for action
effective. And because we are one people, 'gathered together in the unity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,' we recite the Creed, affirming the unity of our faith.”[13]

In an analogous way, also in our personal reading of the Bible—above all, of the Gospels—we hear God’s voice, which we have to strive to apply to our specific situation. If we make an effort to be attentive—with a filial attention—in reading the sacred texts, our efforts will truly become prayer. “When you open the Holy Gospel,” our Founder wrote, “think that what is written there—the words and deeds of Christ—is something that you should not only know, but live. Everything, every point that is told there, has been gathered, detail-by-detail, for you to make it come alive in the individual circumstances of your life.

“God has called us Catholics to follow him closely. In that holy Writing you will find the Life of Jesus, but you should also find your own life there.

“You too, like the Apostle, will learn to ask, full of love, ‘Lord, what would you have me do?’ And in your soul you will hear the conclusive answer, ‘The Will of God!’

“Take up the Gospel every day, then, and read it and live it as a definite rule. This is what the saints have done.”[14]

In the document that I mentioned, Benedict XVI dedicates various paragraphs to explaining how the lives of the saints offer a great help in penetrating more deeply into the meaning of Scripture. St. Gregory the Great (the Pope cites these words in his Apostolic Exhortation) assures us that *viva lectio est vita bonorum*,[15] the lives of the saints present us with a vibrant and deep reading of Scripture. “The most profound interpretation of Scripture comes precisely from those who let themselves be shaped by the word of God through listening, reading and assiduous meditation... It is certainly not by chance,” continues the Holy Father, “that the great currents of spirituality in the Church's history originated with an explicit reference to Scripture.”[16]

After stating that “every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God,”[17] the Holy Father mentions various saints who have brought new lights, taken from the Gospel, to the life of the Church; and
he says that one of those rays of light is seen in “Saint Josemaría Escrivá in his preaching of the universal call to holiness.”[18] These words have filled us, as is only natural, with great happiness, while at the same time they are a call to our sense of responsibility, to take better advantage of our Father’s teachings and spread his message even more widely, and thus love God and the Church more.

Let us follow, then, St. Josemaría’s advice to make frequent use of the texts of the Bible to nourish our periods of prayer and to contemplate the scenes of Christ’s life, putting ourselves into the Gospel “as one more person there.” The liturgical texts of the Mass, both in Advent and at Christmas, strongly urge us to grow in familiarity with the Word of God and to increase our intimacy with Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Let us enter resolutely into their lives, accompanying the three of them with our whole heart.

“Our Lord’s whole life fills me with love for him,” St. Josemaría wrote, “but I have a special weakness for his thirty hidden years spent in Bethlehem, Egypt and Nazareth. That period, so long in comparison with his public life and which the Gospels hardly mention, might seem empty of any special meaning to a person who views it superficially. And yet, I have always maintained that this silence about our Lord’s early life speaks eloquently for itself, and contains a wonderful lesson for us Christians. They were years of intense work and prayer, years during which Jesus led an ordinary life, a life like ours, we might say, which was both divine and human at the same time. In his simple workshop, unnoticed, he did everything to perfection, just as he was later to do before the multitudes.”[19]

There is one suggestion I would like to give you, taking advantage of the Pope’s words about St. Josemaría: let us all increase our eagerness to get to know deeply our Father’s commentaries on Sacred Scripture. Thus we will learn to sail more securely on the deep sea of Revelation, and we will discover the spiritual meaning that is hidden in the words of the sacred text: what the Holy Spirit wants to tell us, here and now, each and every one of us. From this perspective I invite you to reread a point from The Forge: “Aquae multae non potuerunt extinguere caritatem! —The great turmoil of waters could not quench the fire of charity. I offer you two
interpretations of these words of Holy Scripture. First: the multitude of your past sins, now that you have fully repented of them, will not take you away from the Love of our God; and a second one: the waters of misunderstanding, the difficulties that you are perhaps encountering, should not interrupt your apostolic work.”[20]

In recent days I made a rapid trip to Fatima and to Santiago de Compostela, following in our Founder’s footsteps. You know that the Shrine of Fatima had a special attraction for him; there, as I have mentioned on other occasions, St. Josemaría went frequently to entrust his intentions to our Lady, convinced that the prayer of Mary is always heard by our Lord. I also went to Santiago de Compostela, recalling the pilgrimage that our Founder made to the Apostle’s tomb in 1938, which was also a jubilee year, and uniting myself to the prayer of Benedict XVI when he was there a few days earlier. In both places I felt everyone supporting me—as I asked your sisters and brothers in Rome to do before leaving—so that our Lord will grant us all that we are asking of him. I prayed for the Church, for the Pope, for the faithful—each woman and man—of Opus Dei. Let us always go to Jesus through Mary, with faith and perseverance, united in our prayer to the Church and to all mankind.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, December 1, 2010


[10] Ibid.


[12] Ibid., no. 30.


[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.


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**Letter of August 2010**

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

I am writing you on my return from a trip to several countries in South America. When I was in Ecuador, Peru and Brazil, besides the joy of being with many of your brothers and sisters, and many other people, I prayed before several images of the Blessed Virgin. Supported by each one of you, I endeavored to pray with the piety with which St. Josemaría prayed before
images of our Lady. I thanked our Mother for her constant prayer for the Church and the Work, and asked her to continue to bless us abundantly. I did indeed rely upon your prayer to Mary, because I bear deeply engraved on my heart some ardent words of our Father in the Sanctuary of the “Aparecida,” which he later repeated in São Paulo: “I told our Lady that I want to pray with great faith.” Earlier, in Ecuador, I considered the splendid lesson given by St. Josemaría when suffering from altitude sickness, the so-called “soroche.” This forced him to reduce his catechetical activity almost completely while he continued to grow in his personal devotion to St. Joseph and in spiritual childhood. There, for two weeks, he was “actively inactive.” In Peru, many memories passed through my mind. They include his great joy on seeing a representation of a scene that he carried deep in his heart: the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph adoring Jesus hidden in the tabernacle. With what great affection he remained there before the altar!

Let us intensify our manifestations of love for our Lady during the months that remain in this Marian year. Precisely on the 15th, feast of the Assumption, we will begin the second part of it. Let us strive to live it with a renewed filial spirit, at the pace of St. Josemaría’s Marian life. “If there is anything in which I would like you to imitate me,” he frequently said, “it is in the love that I have for our Lady.” On other occasions he told us: “imitate Jesus Christ, who is our Model for everything, also in his love for his Mother.”[1]

We are now at the midpoint of the year we have put in our Lady’s hands for the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Work among women. This is an opportunity to draw up a balance sheet of the weeks that have already gone by, in order to spur us to continue forward at a good pace. “When the feasts of our Lady come round let us not be sparing in our tokens of affection. Let us raise our hearts to her more often, asking her for what we need, thanking her for her constant, motherly care and entrusting to her the people we love. Though, naturally, if we really want to act as good children, every day is a good day for loving Mary, just as every day is a good day for those who really love one another.”[2]

The solemnity on the 15th invites us to diligently put our Father’s advice into practice. God’s marvelous choice of her from all eternity to be
the Mother of the Word Incarnate reaches its culminating point when she is gloriously received, body and soul, into heaven. Mary’s Assumption, which terminates the arc that began with her Immaculate Conception, strongly spurs us to fix our attention more carefully on our Mother and meditate more deeply on her daily pilgrimage through this world, until arriving at her heavenly dwelling.

In the gospel of the Mass for this feast, the Church sets before us the passage about our Lady’s visitation to her cousin St. Elizabeth. The Fathers and ecclesiastical writers have always seen this episode as a graphic portrayal of what characterized Mary’s entire life, defined by prompt, joyful obedience to whatever God indicated to her. From the fiat that she said at the Annunciation until that other fiat, expressed without words at the foot of the Cross, the whole of Mary’s life can be summarized as complete faithfulness to God’s most lovable will, without the slightest breach.

St. Luke, the evangelist who most spoke about Mary, gives us many details about our Lady’s visit to St. Elizabeth. It is a scene deeply impressed upon our memory, like many others in the Gospel, because we contemplate it every day when we meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary. Let us savor it once more.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zachary and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”[3]

The Blessed Virgin, also inspired by the Holy Spirit, replied to Elizabeth’s words with the canticle filled with gratitude and uncontainable joy that we call the Magnificat. We can’t stop to consider all of its riches. I only want to stress here a few details of this scene, on which St. Josemaría meditated deeply.
St. Gabriel informed Mary that Elizabeth was expecting a child, as a proof of God’s omnipotence. He didn’t ask or suggest that she visit her cousin. Nonetheless our Lady senses that her cousin needs her assistance and finds God’s will here as well. She sets out immediately for the village where her elderly cousin lives. As St. Luke opportunistically stresses, Mary does so with haste, *cum festinatione*. The reason, as St. Ambrose explains, is clear: “The grace of the Holy Spirit does not permit slowness.”[^4] The Holy Father Benedict XVI follows that Doctor of the Church in commenting: “with these words the Evangelist wishes to emphasize that for Mary to follow her own vocation in docility to God’s Spirit, who has brought about within her the Incarnation of the Word, means taking a new road and immediately setting out from home, allowing herself to be led on a journey by God alone.”[^5]

The Gospel provides us with the first lesson that we learn from our Mother’s steadfast conduct. When God’s love is manifested to our soul, our duty lies in corresponding urgently to his grace, responding with full generosity to the divine inspirations, without hesitation or delay. When God passes by our side (he has called and calls all of us by our name to follow him very closely), we have to set aside anything that could impede our following him, our living with him. Our entire existence has to be marked by the “sacred haste” that, as the Pope says, is expected of anyone who realizes that “God always has first priority and nothing else should create haste in our existence.”[^6]

I recall certain events in our Father’s life that illustrate how our Founder nourished this haste to love God and our Lady ever more deeply.

His biographers recount how from the earliest years of the Work, as affection for our Mother grew in his soul, he would strive to greet Mary in the images he encountered along the streets of Madrid. On one occasion he recorded in his personal notes: “This morning I retraced my steps, becoming a little child, to greet our Lady in the image on Atocha Street, high up on the house of the Congregation of St. Philip. I had forgotten to greet her. What child would miss the opportunity to tell his mother that he loves her? Lady, may I never become an ex-child.”[^7]
One day in Villa Tevere, when he was beginning to feel weak towards the end of his life, he passed by a relief of the Blessed Virgin holding the Child. He wanted to kiss the image, but it wasn’t easy because of the bench in front of it. But he made an effort to do so. Afterwards he invited us to consider that, although the effort he had had to make didn’t amount to anything, we ought to ask ourselves how diligently we strive to show our affection in corresponding to the love of God and our Lady, shown so abundantly in the Incarnation. I pass this question on to you. What specific effort have we decided to make during the remaining months of the Marian year in order to correspond to the special love that our Lord and his Blessed Mother constantly show us? Do we want to love her more? [Sp: Queremos quererla más?] This is not redundant. Do we seek her with the desire that she bring us to her Son?

Let us consider another facet of the scene of the Visitation. When Mary exclaims her praise for God in the Magnificat, she follows this immediately, as earlier at the Annunciation, with an acknowledgement of her lowliness, proclaiming her nothingness before God. This acknowledgement is an essential part of the virtue of humility. “How great is the value of humility! ‘Quia respexit humilitatem…’ —‘Because he has regarded the lowliness…’ It is not of her faith, nor of her charity, nor of her immaculate purity that our Mother speaks in the house of Zachary. Her joyful hymn sings: ‘Because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid, behold: henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.’”[8]

St. Augustine pointed out that “the dwelling place of charity is humility.”[9] Sincere charity grows only in soil that has been fertilized by deep humility. Our Lady’s extraordinary humility led her to always want God to work in her soul, without claiming any merit for herself. Thus God looked upon her with ever increasing love, leading her from fullness to fullness until receiving her in glory.

My daughters and sons, let us learn from this good Mother of ours how to act in the same way in every circumstance. Until the last moment we will have to struggle against the enemies of our sanctification, especially against self-love, which is the principal obstacle to our union with God. Let us listen once again to St. Josemaría. On one occasion, responding to someone who asked him how to struggle in this aspect of the spiritual life,
he stressed: “it is good that you have the desire to fight against pride. Nevertheless I, though not a prophet, tell you that you will have problems with pride right up to the final moments of your life. Ask God to make you humble.... Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae (Lk 1:48). God our Lord looked upon her because he saw the humility of his servant. Therefore, you should strive to serve our Lord and to imitate our Lady in her humility. In the Gospels we don't find Mary present at the moment of her Son’s great triumphs. We find her at the foot of the Cross. But we also find her at the first miracle, which our Lord works because the Blessed Virgin requests it. Ask him for the miracle of making you humble and making me humble.”[10]

Meditating on Mary’s great privileges certainly fills us with astonishment. Our heavenly Mother is so very marvelous! We contemplate her, in the scene from the Apocalypse, clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet and crowned with the stars.[11] Nevertheless, “we know that all these privileges were not granted in order to distance Mary from us but, on the contrary, to bring her close.”[12] From heaven, she follows the steps of each of us as though each were her only son, her only daughter. And she never ceases to care for us, so that one day, in union with her Son and all the angels and saints, we may reach eternal beatitude.

We will recall this once again on August 15 as we renew the consecration of Opus Dei to her sweet and immaculate Heart. On that day let us foster a communion of intentions among all the faithful of the Prelature—those of us still here on earth and those who have already surrendered their souls to God—and very especially with our Father. Let us be closely united to the consecration that he made at Loreto in 1951 and to the one that I will personally renew in everyone’s name in this Marian year. We will entrust our desires and endeavors to the care of our Mother, who is, in the fitting words of St. Thomas Aquinas, “ totius Trinitatis nobilis triclinium,”[13] the place where the Blessed Trinity finds repose. As the Holy Father said in a recent audience, “because of the Incarnation, the three divine Persons dwell in her soul full of grace and feel delight and joy as in no other creature. Through her intercession we can obtain every help.”[14]

We will do so also on the 22nd of this month, feast of the Queenship
of Mary, and on the following day, the anniversary of the divine locution that left in our Father a “savor of honey and the honeycomb” at a time when he was especially in need of it: *adeamus cum fiducia ad thronum gloriae, ut misericordiam consequamur!* Let us go with confidence to the throne of glory, that we might obtain mercy!

Let us intensify our prayer for the Holy Father, for his intentions, for all the hopes and plans that, for the good of souls, he bears in his heart, and also that he be able to rest during these months.

And, along with all this, help me with my intentions.

I bless you with all my affection,

Your Father,

+Javier

Pamplona, August 1, 2010


[6] Ibid.


Letter of October 2010

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

Our soul overflows with joy in imagining our Father’s happiness on October 2, 1928. Let us unite ourselves to the prayer that flowed from his soul when, on his knees, he realized how much trust heaven was placing in him. And let us often consider—every day—the reality that we too were included in that manifestation of God to St. Josemaría.

Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord, sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.[1] Tomorrow’s Mass for the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels begins with these words from Sacred Scripture, which have to find a strong echo among the women and men of Opus Dei. They can serve as a channel to raise our hearts in gratitude to God on this new anniversary of the foundation, for—as our Father said—“it was not by chance that God inspired the Work on the day when the Church celebrates the angels.... We owe them much more than you think.”[2] It gives me great joy to remind you how often—and specifically in Argentina, in La Chacra—St. Josemaría suggested to us that, upon entering the oratory, we express our gratitude to the angels for perpetually accompanying our Lord in the Eucharist.

We can consider here the deep roots that devotion to the angels has in the Church. One could say that there is hardly any page in Sacred Scripture—both the Old as well as the New Testament—in which these purely spiritual creatures, who enjoy the beatific vision and are at the service of God's plans, do not appear.[3] In one of his catechetical addresses, John Paul II said that denying their existence would require radically changing Sacred Scripture itself, and with it the whole history of salvation,[4] thus making a serious mistake.

Tomorrow’s feast offers us an opportunity to get to know these
heavenly beings better, considering above all that they are God’s creatures and that Jesus Christ alone is the center of the angelic world and of the entire cosmos. The primacy of Christ, the Word incarnate, over creation, is one of the foundations of our Catholic faith. For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.[5]

“What is an angel?” Pope Benedict XVI asked. And he answered: “Sacred Scripture and the Church’s tradition enable us to discern two aspects. On the one hand, the angel is a creature who stands before God, oriented to God with his whole being. All three names of the archangels end with the word ‘El,’ which means ‘God.’ God is inscribed in their names, in their nature. Their true nature is existing in his sight and for him.”[6]

These statements emphasize that the most important mission of the angels is to adore the Most Holy Trinity, to constantly raise up a song of thanksgiving to the Creator and Lord of all things, visible and invisible. Both angels and men have been created for the same end. The angels have already attained it, while we are still on the way. Therefore, it is a very good idea to count on their help so that they teach us to follow the path that leads to heaven. “I pray to and invoke the angels every day,” our Father once said, “and I go to the intercession of the guardian angels of my children so that we all learn how to accompany our God closely. Thus we will be zealous, souls who are determined to bring the joy of God’s doctrine to all creatures.”[7]

St. Josemaría encouraged us to invoke the angels as we begin our morning prayer every day, after going to the intercession of the Mother of God and St. Joseph. With what devotion do we have recourse to them? With what assurance of being heard? And especially in regard to the celebration of the Eucharist, our Father said: “I adore and praise with the angels—it is not difficult, because I know that, as I celebrate the Holy Mass, they surround me, adoring the Blessed Trinity.”[8] Also when we visit Jesus present in the Tabernacle, and perhaps don’t know how to greet him, or how to express our gratitude or adoration, we can imitate St. Josemaría’s example. “Whenever I enter an oratory,” he confided to us, “I
pause to tell our Lord: Jesus, I love you. And I praise the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...And 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!”[9] I suggest to you that, day after day, you seek to unite yourselves to our Founder’s prayer, on October 2, 1928: may our hearts not slacken in the dialogue of gratitude and responsibility with which our Father responded.

Since the angels are devout adorers of the Blessed Trinity, they can fulfill with perfection “the second aspect that characterizes angels: they are God’s messengers. They bring God to mankind, they open heaven and thus open earth. Precisely because they are with God, they can also be very close to man.”[10] Jesus revealed this when, speaking of the love of God the Father for children and for those who become like children, he said: See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.[11]

Based on these words and on other inspired texts, the Church teaches that “from infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession.”[12] And she makes her own an affirmation frequently found in the writings of the Fathers of the Church: “Each of the faithful has at their side an angel as a protector and shepherd to guide their life.”[13] Among the heavenly spirits, the guardian angels have been placed by God at the side of every man and woman. They are our close friends and allies in the battle we are waging, as Scripture tells us, against the snares of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.[14] Our Father echoes this teaching in clear terms: “Turn to your guardian angel at the moment of trial; he will protect you from the devil and bring you holy inspirations.”[15]

A second-century Christian writer offers some signs for recognizing the suggestions of the good angels and distinguishing them from those of the bad angels. “The angel of righteousness is gentle and modest, meek
and peaceful. When, therefore, he comes into your heart, he immediately talks to you of righteousness, purity, chastity, holiness, mortification, and every righteous work and glorious virtue. When all these arise in your heart, know that the angel of righteousness is with you. These are the deeds of the angel of righteousness. Trust him, then, and his works.”

The struggle between good and evil—the sad inheritance of original sin—is a constant reality in human existence on this earth. Therefore, as an ancient prayer says, we want to ask our guardian angel: Sancti Angeli Custodes nostri, defendite nos in proelio ut non pereamus in tremendo iudicio. Holy guardian angels: defend us in battle, so that we do not perish at the final judgment.

From his earliest youth, our Founder cultivated a deep devotion to the angels, and especially to his own guardian angel. Later, from the moment of the foundation of Opus Dei, his biography is filled with a strong and trusting piety towards these worshippers of God, and our good companions on the path to heaven. His writings as well contain abundant references to the ministry of the angels on behalf of mankind. As Scripture says, Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? So great was his faith in the intervention of the angels, that he taught us to consider them as important allies in our apostolic work. “Win over the guardian angel of the one you want to draw to your apostolate. He is always a great ‘accomplice’,” he wrote in The Way. And on considering that often the environment in which one finds oneself for professional or social reasons, etc., may seem far from God, he assured us: “You say there are many occasions of going astray in such surroundings? That’s true, but aren’t there any guardian angels as well?”

The pealing of the bells of the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, which never died out in our Father’s heart, should resound in our own, as a reminder that our entire life has to be adoration for God, in union with our Lady, the angels, and the whole Church triumphant.

Our Father also cultivated a friendship with the archangel who—according to some Fathers of the Church—assists each priest in his ministry. “There is a very probable opinion that priests have an angel especially devoted to their care. But many years ago I read that each priest
has a ministerial archangel and I was moved. I composed for myself a sort of Alleluia as an aspiration, and I recite it to my ministerial archangel in the morning and at night. At times I have thought that I do not have sufficient motive to believe in this, just because it was written by a Father of the Church whose name I don't even remember. But then I think of the goodness of my Father God, and I grow certain that, by praying to my ministerial archangel, even if I didn't have one, our Lord would send me one, to give a basis for my prayer and my devotion.”[20]

Let us often stop to think about these and other teachings regarding the holy angels and strive to put them into practice, each in one’s own way. Let us go to their help with confidence and trust. Internal difficulties that seem insuperable, exterior obstacles that look like real walls, are overcome with the help of these friends who are so powerful and to whose care God has entrusted us. But, as our Founder taught, drinking from the fountain of the Church’s spiritual tradition, we need to foster an authentic friendship with our guardian angel and with those of the people we are trying to reach in our apostolate. For “the guardian angel is a Prince of Heaven whom God has placed at our side to watch over and assist us, to encourage us in our trials, to lighten our suffering, to guide and uphold us if we are about to fall.”[21]

We find another reflection that can give us a lot of consolation in St. Josemaría’s book Furrow: “The guardian angel always accompanies us as our principal witness. It is he who, at your particular judgment, will remember the kind deeds you performed for our Lord throughout your life. Furthermore, when you feel lost, before the terrible accusations of the enemy, your angel will present those intimations of your heart—which perhaps you yourself might have forgotten—those proofs of love which you might have had for God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. That is why you must never forget your guardian angel, and that Prince of Heaven will not abandon you now, or at that decisive moment.”[22]

In our spiritual struggle and in the apostolate, we can always count on the care and the protection of the Queen of Angels. During this month we celebrate one of her feasts under the advocatio of the Rosary. This Marian devotion is “a powerful weapon”[23] in all our battles for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. I hope that we will all put special affection into
praying this prayer with piety in the coming weeks, with the conviction that our heavenly Mother, throughout this Marian Year, will obtain for us abundant graces from her Son.

In finishing, I remind you that the upcoming 6th is the anniversary of the canonization of our Father. Let us ask our Lord, through his intercession, that the supernatural joy that filled our heart on that day, and the spur towards holiness that we then received, will be kept alive and vigorous in his daughters and sons in Opus Dei, and in all those who come close to the Work. I confess to you that each day I ask St. Josemaría to make very much present in each one of us those clear words—the saint of ordinary life—which the Servant of God John Paul II applied to him.[24]

We could consider it also in this light: St. Josemaría is the saint who helps us in all the circumstances of each day. Let us take greater advantage of that “occupation” of our Father, who loves us very, very much, but who wants us to be saints.

Truly, every month there are many feasts of the Church and commemorations of the Work’s history: consider them carefully, so that our daily serviam! be very generous.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, October 1, 2010


[19] Ibid., no. 566.


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Homilies

At the naming of a church for St. Josemaría, Torun, Poland (August 27, 2010)
My dear sisters and brothers:

The Servant of God John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have often reminded us that our Lord also addresses us through the saints, because by their lives they speak to us of the Christian perfection to which we are all called. Therefore we want to be more aware that we can and should live that exhortation from the Psalm: *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes*, “Praise the Lord all you peoples.” This exclamation of praise and thanksgiving to God rises up today from our hearts as we participate in this ceremony in Torun. I confess that it is not easy for me to manifest all the joy in my heart upon celebrating the Holy Sacrifice in this church.

My thanksgiving goes out to the Most Blessed Trinity, along with gratitude to my beloved brother, Bishop Suski, who invited me to this solemn ceremony. It fills us all with joy to consider that from this church, which is today being dedicated to St. Josemaría, there will rise up to heaven every day, with the intercession of St. Josemaría, the prayers of the faithful of this beloved diocese. It is difficult to express in words St. Josemaría’s close union with your homeland, Poland, and with the Polish people. He prayed year after year with faith and perseverance for you as early as the thirties of the last century. Although he did not live to see here on earth the beginning of the Prelature’s apostolic work in Poland, he ardently desired that moment, which arrived in the time of my beloved predecessor, the first successor of St. Josemaría at the head of Opus Dei. I recall that even at the beginning of the Work of God he turned his eyes to this country with the ardent hope that the path God had placed in his soul, then still a dream, would become a reality here. Therefore I can assure you that already back then he prayed for you, and now from heaven he intercedes before God for your families and for each one of you.

It seems opportune to briefly recall here some key aspects of St. Josemaría’s message, in line with the Liturgy of the Word for the Mass proper to the saint.

1. The Book of Genesis relates how our first parents were placed in paradise *ut operaretur* (see *Gen* 2:15), so that they would assist in the development of God’s creative work. Making use of these words, St. Josemaría preached untiringly about the sanctifying value of human work,
through which men and women cooperate in the work of creation. By our daily effort to carry out in a holy way, in a Christian way, the tasks of each day, we can give glory to God. For in our daily work we find, as the Founder of Opus Dei said, that divine, holy “something” hidden in the most ordinary situations, which it is up to each of you to discover, because our Lord does not cease to look at us and speak to us continually.

We Christians can carry out our work with a holy pride, with the joy of serving our Lord and others, in the midst of the world. God awaits us each day among the books, the tools, in front of the computer, in the home, in the kitchen, and also in our relaxation. If we seek him in our daily work, there will burn in us the eagerness to bring him to the people around us, to be apostolic women and men wherever we find ourselves.

St. Josemaría frequently recalled that, to love God with our whole heart and our whole strength, we don’t have to look for extraordinary situations, or for tasks that are unattainable for a Christian. The Servant of God John Paul II, to whom we owe so much throughout the whole world, referred to St. Josemaría as the “saint of the ordinary.” He thus reminded us that our Lord asks of us a joyful and generous struggle to carry out the small duty of each moment with the greatest perfection possible, taking up our various duties with the peace of the children of God, who always assists us so that we can sanctify ourselves, sanctify others, and sanctify our work.

2. As we read in the Epistle to the Romans: All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship [whereby] we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ (Rom 8:14-15). “Children of God!” exclaimed St. Josemaría with holy pride, “bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls, of the only brightness which can never be darkened, dimmed or overshadowed.” The certainty of our divine filiation brings heaven close to us, because we have a Father who loves us madly, and who perseveringly awaits us.

The obstacles that we confront in today’s environment are not hidden from us. Nor is there a lack of daily difficulties and sufferings, small and great, in supporting our families, and carrying out our professional and civic duties. But God, who is a good Father, gives his children all they need
to be happy and faithful on earth, no matter what happens. Each day, in our family and at work, among our friends, we have to spread to others, with the serenity of one who knows he or she is constantly watched over and protected by our Father God, the message that we are all called by God to personal holiness. And we will bring this joy to men and women with our smile, our affectionate words, our patience in the face of mishaps, with the example of our consistent Christian behavior.

3. St. Josemaría spoke a great deal about God’s closeness to souls, and the closeness of souls to God: a certainty that spurs us to want to help many other people discover the treasure of their divine filiation. In the passage about the miraculous catch of fish, one of the Gospel texts most frequently commented on by St. Josemaría, Jesus invites us to be apostolic. Duc in altum! Set out into the deep!

We should all feel the responsibility to respond to the evangelizing call of Christ and of his Church, to speak about, because we live these truths in our own life, the sacraments, the greatness of marriage and the family. Each of us will carry this out in a different way, in our own environment: as in the boat of the apostle Peter, some at the oars, others at the nets, or in tasks during embarking, and all helping one another with our prayer and mortification. Our Lord is the Master of the Holy Church, of this boat that has plowed the seas of history for more than twenty centuries, which is another reason that fills us with hope and optimism, and responsibility, because each of us is the Church. This is a good moment to ask ourselves what more we can do to push the boat of the Church out into the deep and obtain an abundant catch. God wants to count on each of you to bring the call of his love to this beloved Poland and to the whole world. Let us be valiant, I insist, in giving witness to God’s love by our daily life and our words.

The image of the boat is also a reminder that we should all pray daily for the Vicar of Christ on earth, the Holy Father Benedict XVI. Let us do so now, in the Holy Mass, and frequently throughout the day, with the determination to not leave him alone, offering him the company of our prayer and affection.

Before concluding, I ask that you pray for your bishops and your
priests, so that they be holy, very holy, and so that they foster tirelessly the search for seminarians in this land that our Lord has blessed, as he always does, with the Cross and with the certainty of the faith. Let us put these desires in the hands of our Mother, our Lady of Czestochowa, who accompanies us constantly with her maternal care along the path of sanctity, the path of intimacy with Jesus Christ.

At the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature, Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (September 5, 2010)

My dear sisters and brothers,

dear ordinands

1. We have sung Gratias agimus tibi propter magnum gloriame tuam!—we give thanks to God for being who he is. It is good that this cry rise up frequently from our soul, since God wants to converse with each and every one of us. His infinite perfection draws near to the poor creatures that all of us are. Today, with this ceremony, he tells us that he also speaks through his ministers, and specifically through these two new priests who will be dispensers of his grace, as are the other sacred ministers, through the sacraments and the preaching of the Word of God.

A little more than two months ago we concluded the Year for Priests convoked by Benedict XVI. He asked all of us to feel our responsibility to pray each day for the sanctity of priests and for the number of priestly vocations to increase throughout the whole world, so that many men determined to be faithful ministers of God may enter the seminaries. We also have to take advantage of this ceremony, and of our whole life, to ask God that all Catholics, both men and women, may truly be aware of the priestly soul that the Lord has granted to us, since the Blessed Trinity has entrusted his Church to each and every one of us.
“To be the Church” (which is what we are), we need to realize that we have been called to continue in time the mission that God the Father entrusted to Jesus Christ: the mission to win for us salvation, freedom from our sins. The sacred writer, in the Letter to the Hebrews, places some words from a Psalm on the lips of Christ, the second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, who took our flesh with the limitations proper to human nature except for sin: *corpus autem aptasti mihi... ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam.* “You have fitted a body to me, that I might do your will, O God.” These words can be applied to everyone. How can we not feel the joy and responsibility of God’s trust in each and every one of us to continue in time Christ’s mission? So there are no excuses. We can’t say: the problem is, I’m weak, I don’t have the right conditions, I don’t have a knack for doing apostolate… No, God expects a loyal and coherent life from us that will lead us to identify ourselves with this Christ whom St. Josemaría trustingly called “our Christ,” “my Jesus.” By identifying ourselves with him we will be able, through our life, to help many other people come to know and draw close to him. Our Lord asks all of us Catholics to be loyal. He asks all of us not to leave him alone.

Here we see the intersection between divine logic, which knows only God’s infinite love and mercy, and our human response. We heard it in the readings, when St. Paul speaks to the ministers, but also to the rest of the faithful, because we are all called to continue Christ’s mission. He invites us to sow all over the world the seed of peace and joy, of reconciliation with God, brought into the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul tells us, with the strength of a person in love with Christ, as all of us should be, that Christ’s charity is urging us on. The love of Christ, his yearning for our salvation, has to be for us a daily restlessness that leads us to pray and to launch out to help those around us to get to know our Savior better.

Today, and every day, we should foster the conviction that we are able to carry out our tasks, all of our tasks, with a priestly soul, which as St. Josemaría so often said, is shown in an eagerness to draw ever closer to Jesus, to love all souls ever more truly, with a faithfulness and loyalty to the faith that nothing can deter. This is a program that all of us can carry out.
2. We find ourselves in the Shrine of Torreciudad, dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels, to the Mother of God and our Mother—the Eucharistic woman, the great co-redemptrix. And we go to Mary asking her to teach us to live that paradox—although being of such little worth, we nevertheless can and should be other Christs, Christ himself. Therefore I ask you and I ask myself, with that incisive question of St. Josemaría: Is Christian life spreading around you? Where? In your work, in your friendships, and of course, also in your home. We have to be bonds of unity with our Lord and bonds of unity among ourselves, through our priestly soul.

Some words in the Gospel show us the continuous self-giving that Jesus lived and that he asks of all those who have been called to the Catholic faith. Our Lord, speaking with his disciples, whom he loved madly, just as he loves us, addressed his Father God: pro eis sanctifico meipsum. I am sanctifying myself for all of them…. This calls to mind the Founder of Opus Dei’s exhortation that those who pass by our side have to sense the “impact” of God in their soul, the love of God. Would that those who draw close us for any circumstance could say: I have met someone, or I have spoken with someone who is aware of his or her responsibility, because of the gift they have received, to transmit by their life, by their behavior, the faith that our Lord has placed in their soul.

You, new ministers of God, look perseveringly to the Master so as to always act as he would have done. I want to mention some words of St. Josemaría that I heard a few months ago on a magnetic tape. He was speaking about his priestly work and the help that he wanted to provide to everyone through his words, through his charity, through his human and supernatural affection. On one occasion he had to help a person who had experienced the loneliness of indifference, and who was very sad. Our Father went to him, with the solicitude of the good shepherd, and led him to open up his soul. St. Josemaría said later (and this is what drew my attention, although he always acted in this way) that on realizing the difficult situation that person was in, he tried to treat him “as Christ would have done.”

My children, the new priests and all of you. Let us truly try to treat people with the clear realization that our Lord is making use of us so that
they might encounter the joy of faith, the joy of a God who never abandons us. While we men and women may leave people isolated, God is always with us, he is always our God, our Love, our point of reference.

My dear sons, new priests, never forget that, in receiving the Holy Spirit through the imposition of the bishop’s hands, the Blessed Trinity conforms you sacramentally to Christ. This is for you, for all priests, a great joy and a great responsibility. All of us—also the faithful, both the women and men with their priestly souls, as St. Josemaria said—have to fight daily to not disappoint God, to not disappoint the Church, to not disappoint souls, to not disappoint so many people who, whether realizing it or not, are seeking the truth that is lacking in their lives.

May you put great care each day into the exercise of your ministry, above all in three moments: the Holy Mass, the administration of the sacrament of forgiveness, and in preaching. Let us all consider, especially us priests, that in the Holy Mass we are united to the whole Church and that Mass should be for all of us the center and root of our life. Celebrate Mass with piety. While we always have to conduct ourselves as ministers of God, I dare to say that at Mass we are more “of God.” And the lay faithful also, when participating in the Holy Sacrifice, are more “of God.” Let us live those moments with due recollection, both exterior and interior. I recall the words that St. Josemaria took from a holy bishop addressed to priests: “Treat him well for me, treat him well for me!” Our Father used those words for his preaching, and above all to give example to them by his life. Therefore I ask you, in God’s name, with the strength of that holy priest, St. Josemaria, to treat our God as well as possible. May you hear deep in your soul that cry: “Treat him well for me, treat him well for me!”

3. You priests will also be dispensers of God’s forgiveness. Through the administration of the Sacrament of Penance, proclaim to everyone that our Lord wants to forgive us always; he is not startled by our miseries, but receives us like the father of the prodigal son, to embrace us and, as our Father used to say, translating the Gospel somewhat freely, “to devour us with kisses.” We want to live permanently in his friendship. In the confessional Christ awaits you, in the confessional souls await you. May all of us, priests as well, receive this sacrament that puts us on good terms with God, and that St. Josemaría, precisely because of the friendship that the
forgiveness of sins brings to our soul, called the “sacrament of joy.”

Let us close by praying once more for priests. I would like to read to you some words of Benedict XVI, because we should pray for all priests throughout the whole world. The Pope currently reigning, whom we have to pray for with our whole hearts as children, said: “The priest does something which no human being can do of his own power: in Christ’s name he speaks the words which absolve us of our sins and in this way he changes, starting with God, our entire life. Over the offerings of bread and wine he speaks Christ’s words of thanksgiving, which are words of transubstantiation—words which make Christ himself present, the Risen One, his Body and Blood—words which thus transform the elements of the world, which open the world to God and unite it to him.” Then the Pope continued: “This audacity of God who entrusts himself to human beings—who, conscious of our weaknesses, nonetheless considers men capable of acting and being present in his stead—this audacity of God is the true grandeur concealed in the word priesthood.”[1]

My priest sons, realize the trust that God has in you, that he wants to be able to count on us. And also all you women and men should realize that God is relying on you to make use of your lives so that people come closer to Him.

I now address especially the families of the two men being ordained. How many things St. Josemaría would tell you if he were physically among us! He is telling you them from heaven. He would thank you for having assisted in their formation and creating an environment where the priestly vocation of your children or of your brothers was able to take form. But he would also ask you to pray for all families with someone being called by God but who see that person’s vocation as an obstacle. Pray for those families so that they welcome this sign of God’s trust and have the great happiness—as you yourselves do, parents and brothers and sisters of the new priests—that God has deigned to choose one of your family who, as his minister, will bring the peace of God to the whole world.

Once again we go to Our Lady of the Angels of Torreciudad. Here in this nave, St. Josemaría sat contemplating her statue lost in love. Let us unite ourselves to his prayer then and that of his whole life, asking the
Mother of the Church to watch over the Pope, the bishops and the priests, to watch over all the faithful and all humanity, so that we all want to be men and women loyal to God. Amen


At the inauguration of the academic year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 4, 2010)

My dear brothers and sisters:

I give thanks to God because he has allowed me to be with you once more to celebrate this solemn Eucharist. As is traditional, the Mass we are celebrating at the inauguration of the academic year of our university is the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit. We have a great need to direct ourselves to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity upon beginning a new school year, because we want to give thanks to the Sanctifier for the immense gift of the faith with which he enlightens our understanding so that we can listen to his inspirations and be docile to his requests.

The first reading has helped us relive the day of Pentecost: There appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:3-4). The apostles’ minds, which up till then had been sometimes dominated by passions, prejudices and fears, were opened definitively to the rays of divine Truth.

As then, today too we have to free ourselves from all that hinders our listening to the voice of the Spirit. The recent beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman, which our Holy Father personally celebrated on his trip to the United Kingdom, shows that Pentecost continues being timely and always will be such. The life and writings of the new Blessed are an echo of an interior voice that often fails to coincide with the voice of our personal
desires, of what seems most advantageous or appealing. Rather it is identified with the voice of our conscience, by which God makes himself heard in the depths of our soul. For it is true that our conscience, far from imprisoning us in our own subjectivity, opens us to Transcendence and to docility to God’s will.

“Newman,” said the Holy Father in the Mass of Beatification, “helps us to understand what this means for our daily lives: he tells us that our divine Master has assigned a specific task to each one of us, a ‘definite service,’ committed uniquely to every single person: ‘I have my mission,’ he wrote, ‘I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons’ (Meditations and Devotions, 301-2).”[1]

We can ask ourselves: how is this possible? It seems to me that a good answer can be found in some words of St. Josemaría, who by his life laid the foundations for this university. “The solemn coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was not an isolated event. There is hardly a page in the Acts of the Apostles where we fail to read about him and the action by which he guides, directs, and enlivens the life and work of the early Christian community. It is he who inspires the preaching of St. Peter (see Acts 4:8), who strengthens the faith of the disciples (see Acts 4:31), who confirms with his presence the calling of the Gentiles (see Acts 10:44-47), who sends Saul and Barnabas to the distant lands where they will open new paths for the teaching of Jesus (see Acts 13:204). In a word, his presence and doctrine are everywhere.”[2]

Pentecost also created an indissoluble link between our entering into contact with God and the divine gift of tongues, which permitted the evangelization of diverse cultures and societies: We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God (Acts 2:11). Investigation of the truth about God and about the human person cannot be limited, therefore, to attending classes and studying treatises of theology, philosophy, and the human sciences. This search for truth is also an open and humble dialogue with all those who live and work at our side, and, above all, with the Blessed Trinity, who dwells in the temple of our soul in grace. Only thus, thanks to being docile to the action of the Paraclete, is it possible to attain true wisdom and find an answer to the challenges that are presented to people of all times and places. “If the Holy Spirit himself does not
interiorly assist the heart of the one who is listening, the words of the one who teaches will be of no use.”[3]

I direct myself now in a special way to you, my dear students. In the course of your stay in the Eternal City you will have the opportunity to meet people from all over the world, from different cultures and ways of thinking. Learn to dialogue with them, to listen and appreciate all that is positive in their cultures, traditions, and points of view. This will be for you an opportunity to live in an especially visible way the catholicity, the universality, of the Church. You will become experts in humanity and—what is more important—you will detect in the small events of each day the gentle breath of the Holy Spirit.

Listening to the voice of the Spirit, which leads to many practical consequences for our life of prayer, for professional work, and for our relationships with others, will impel us to proclaim the magnalia Dei, the marvelous works of God, which we have been witnesses to. “Thus,” wrote St. Josemaría, “we shall complete our tasks perfectly, using our time to the full, for we shall be instruments who are in love with God. We shall be conscious of all the responsibility and trust that God has placed on our shoulders in spite of our own weaknesses.”[4]

May our Lady, Temple of the Holy Spirit, intercede for each of us so that our desires to be docile to the Paraclete will become a reality. We ask Mary—our life, our sweetness, and our hope, as we will sing at the end of the Mass in the Salve—to make the image of her Son, Jesus, always shine forth in our lives. Amen


On the 50th anniversary of the erection of the Estudio General de Navarra as a university and of the Association of Friends of the University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain (October 23, 2010)

Here on the campus of the University of Navarra, in a setting evoking that of 50 years ago, we find ourselves taking part in the most important event in the history of mankind: Christ’s Sacrifice, made present in a sacramental way in the Eucharist. We are offering this Eucharist to the Most Blessed Trinity in thanksgiving, as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Association of Friends and the transformation of the Studium Generale into a University. Let us pause in amazement before the Holy Mystery of the Mass, through which our Lord has wanted to draw close to us in the most intimate way, offering us the possibility of sharing in his own Life. He wants us to enjoy already now something of the intimacy that will be ours forever when we go to meet him in our definitive encounter.

It was in this same setting, back in 1967, that St. Josemaría, the Founder of Opus Dei and the first Grand Chancellor of this University, celebrated the Holy Eucharist. I will not stop to consider now the external details of that scene, which he commented on in his homily and which were such a help to all of us who were present then. But I will make use of the text of the homily that this holy priest read standing next to the altar.

The echo of his words still resounds in the hearts of many people. They have helped countless Christians to take more seriously their response to the Love of the Blessed Trinity, with the awareness that our existence must be centered, in a unity of life, on Christ’s Sacrifice, in which God’s infinite Love is poured out on all humanity.

St. Josemaría brought us to consider once again (having preached this since 1928) that our Christian life has to be directed, amid a great variety of circumstances, towards the Eucharist. He showed us that, if we want it
(because God’s grace is never lacking), the Eucharistic mystery will guide and nourish the true path of our daily journey.

As he said at that time, with gratitude and conviction: “the sacramental sacrifice of the Body and Blood of our Lord... binds together all the mysteries of Christianity.” In other words, he insisted that not only have we received these gifts, but that through them we enter fully into the mysteries of God. And thus our entire life is enriched, for we find ourselves entering into the fullness of a God who gives himself to us, both in extraordinary and ordinary events, in the course of our daily life.

We should be filled with joy and a sense of responsibility because it is entirely certain that Deus nobiscum, God is with each one of us. And he is Deus ad salvandum, a God who saves us. In this we can discover the richness of God’s Love for his creatures. St. Josemaría insisted that the possibility of raising to the supernatural order even the most material things should be clear to us, since God has wanted to use bread and wine, fruit of the earth and of the work of human hands, as the material to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, perfect God and perfect Man, who took on our nature with all its characteristics, except sin, in order to carry out our salvation.

The first Grand Chancellor of the University encouraged us (as he does now from heaven) to discover the quid divinum hidden in all the circumstances and concerns of our life, even those that seem most material. He told us that this will come about as a consequence of a deep Eucharistic life, an essentially Eucharistic life, knowing that God-made-Man himself chose to walk along our human paths. Thus we will become more fully men, more fully women, to the extent that we want and allow the Body and Blood of Christ to nourish and energize us, in such a way that our life becomes a continuation of his Life. We can always attain this if we look more steadily at him, if we deal more with him, if we love him more!

Let us never forget, as St. Josemaría reminded us, that we have to focus “seriously on the most material and immediate reality, which is where our Lord is,”[2] that is, our daily life. That holy priest, throughout his earthly journey, always wanted to see with the eyes of Christ: Domine, ut videam; and to act in Christ and for Christ: Domine, ut sit. And he urged us to give
that divine transcendence to our daily life. And precisely because of this, he never tired of repeating his advice that we who know we are God’s children need to “make our day into a Mass.” For this great Mystery, the same Holy Sacrifice of Calvary, has definitively linked heaven and earth. Yes, my beloved brothers and sisters, when we see with Christ’s eyes, when we act in Christ and for Christ, when we live the Mass, we offer ourselves with him to God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, “uniting ourselves to his intentions in the name of all creatures.”[3]

It is very moving to realize that, in spite of our littleness, in spite of our personal weaknesses, our existence takes on a new and much richer dimension if we live our lives with Christ. Through the Eucharist, God makes us the Church, the Body of the Lord, and he places us in his boat so that we might sail confidently through all the waters of society, proclaiming that God calls all men and women to holiness. The path that each one travels in this world of ours (which God loves passionately, even to the point of giving up his Son for us) is linked to the Eucharist, since the force that flows from Jesus’ Body and Blood enables us to make all the pathways of the earth divine. As St. Josemaría said: “When a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God.”[4] If we make up our minds to travel along this path, at times a narrow and difficult one, we will know how to embrace joyfully (perhaps swallowing the tears) the burden of suffering when illness comes, the consequences of poverty, and misunderstanding even on the part of good people, because we will discover, not a cold fate, but the lovable hand of our Father in heaven, who blesses us with the loving demands of the Cross.

Our Lord transmits to us the infinite fruitfulness of the Holy Cross in a special way in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, “the most sacred and transcendent act which man, with the grace of God, can carry out in this life.”[5] The sanctification of each moment—our response to God’s trust in giving us five talents, or two talents—is always a service to the Kingdom of Christ, of which the Church—governed by the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him—is “the seed and the beginning.”[6] and of which we form part. Therefore this priest, St. Josemaría, this good and faithful servant, repeated with great insistence and forcefulness: all of us, each one
of us is the Church, and we have to build up the Church, realizing that our work, our family life, our rest, everything, is a “means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ.”[7]

In this holy battle to carry out God’s will, St. Josemaría, from the time when he was very young, strove to have frequent recourse to the Paraclete, and also advised others to do so. The Holy Spirit has a close connection with the Cross, and therefore with the Eucharist. St. Josemaría expressed this in simple but profound words, saying that “the Holy Spirit comes as the result of the Cross,”[8] and that, after receiving Holy Communion, “when the species disappear, the Holy Spirit remains.” This intimate presence of God in our soul has to spur us to be more serious about sanctifying each of our days.

Certainly, this is not an easy task, and it requires constant effort. But with St. Josemaría I say to each one: counting on grace, you can! For he always carried deep in his heart this marvelous reality: every man and woman has been created in the image and likeness of God and called to share in divine intimacy as a child of God the Father, in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Thus God entrusts us with the task of cooperating with him in the salvation of the world. St. Josemaría reached this conclusion also because—in his deep humility—he knew that he had to do Opus Dei and yet he had no human means, only his youthful years and, above all, God’s grace. Although well convinced of his own littleness, he constantly reminded us that we are all capable of renewing this world of ours and converting all mankind, if we carry out our duties faithfully.

I am very happy to refer here to another point that St. Josemaría preached constantly, with courage and clarity, so that no one would feel left out. Breaking with the way of thinking common at the time when he began the Work, he proclaimed without any hesitation that marriage is a vocation. In the homily that we are recalling today he insisted that the “love which leads to marriage and family, can also be a marvelous divine way, a vocation, a path for a complete dedication to our God.”[9] And as he pointed out on another occasion, it is also clear that to sanctify married life, human love is not sufficient; one needs to practice the theological virtues.
Now I want to address myself in particular to the Friends of the University of Navarre. I cite some words spoken on this campus at the gathering we are commemorating: “You are part of a body of people who know it is committed to the progress of the broader society to which it belongs. Your sincere encouragement, your prayers, sacrifices and contributions are not offered on the basis of Catholic confessionalism. Your cooperation is a clear testimony of a well-formed social conscience, which is concerned with the temporal common good. You are witnesses to the fact that a university can be born of the energies of the people and be sustained by the people.”[10]

I thank you with my whole heart for helping the University of Navarra and I bless your efforts so that they might be more effective every day. At the same time, I remind you that your activities, each day, must be a quest for sanctity, also for the persons you are dealing with. In order to show you the great scope of your work and to confirm you in your commitment, I will mention some words that I frequently heard from the lips of St. Josemaría right from the time I got to know him in 1948, words that he also pronounced here: “the Christian vocation consists in making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my children, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in our hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.”[11]

Hence a Christian, a man or woman of Christ, of the Eucharist, cannot be satisfied with simply working well, with human rectitude. Millions of people who neither know nor deal with God already do this. The men and women who know they have been united to Christ by Baptism and who are nourished by the Eucharist, strive to convert their professional and family life, their daily work, into an instrument of sanctification and of loving service to both heaven and earth. The Opening Prayer we have just prayed, addressed to God the Father, emphasizes this for us, seeking the intercession and example of St. Josemaría: “so that carrying out our daily work we might be formed in the likeness of your Son Jesus Christ and serve the work of Redemption with an ardent love.”

A few moments ago, when the Gospel was read, we listened to the account of the first miraculous catch of fish. This is a scene the Founder of Opus Dei often meditated on. He discovered there how the Master wants
to count on the men and women of all times who desire to follow him.

As we have just heard, St. Luke pauses on an apparently marginal detail. The fishermen, who will later be disciples, are washing and mending their nets after a night of working in vain. The nets symbolize our professional work, our daily tasks, by which we serve and build up society. But by loyally obeying Christ, listening to him as we carry out our tasks, the nets are converted into an instrument to bring souls to God, to the sacraments.

Let us sanctify our work, finishing it well, knowing that from public life, from a professorship, from manual work, from the home, we can reach very far, carrying out Christ’s command: *duc in altum!* He asks us to bring the net of salvation to every corner of the earth. Like the first Christians, we can’t be put off by the environment around us, by the secularism and practical materialism, even though it may be a rarified, aggressive and even hostile atmosphere for us. Full of optimism—for we possess Christ’s Truth, the only Truth—let us meditate on St. Josemaría’s words: “All the seas of this world are ours, and the places where it is harder to fish are the places where it is all the more necessary.”[12]

As we find Christ along our path each day, as we stay close to him in the midst of the concerns of our fellow men and women, let us truly exercise our faith. Faith in God’s love for us. Faith in his Providence. Faith in the power of his message. Faith in his promise to remain with us until the end of time. Faith finally, as the first Grand Chancellor of this University put it, “to show the world that all this is not just ceremonies and words, but a divine reality, by presenting to mankind the testimony of an ordinary life which is made holy.”[13]

Before concluding, I want to wholeheartedly thank all the Authorities who are here today. I also want to thank the beloved people of Navarre and their representatives. I am deeply aware of the material and moral support that they have given to the University since the foundation of the Studium Generale in 1952, and since it was raised by the Holy See to the status of a University, now 50 years ago. I am also aware of how this noble region, so rich in history and in traditions of service to the Church and to civil society, gratefully acknowledges how much this University has done and is
doing for Navarre. This was made manifest several years ago when this Community granted its Golden Medal to the University. Thanks to the formation that this Alma Mater offers students from so many countries and its international prestige in such important fields as medicine, the humanities, law, business, industrial engineering and the ecclesiastical faculties (to cite only some of its areas of study), the name of Navarre is ever better known and esteemed in Spain and abroad, in countries all over the world.

I feel the need, out of justice and sincere affection, to thank the Spanish Episcopal Conference for the support they have offered this university from the first moment. My deepest appreciation goes out to the Most Reverend Archbishop of Pamplona, Don Francisco Perez Gonzalez, and to his immediate predecessors, with especially warm memories of Don Enrique Delgado y Gomez.

I also want to recall the love St. Josemaría showed when he commissioned the statue of Our Lady of Fair Love to be sculpted, in order to give it to the University of Navarra after it had been blessed by the Servant of God, His Holiness Pope Paul VI. Today I want to leave in the hands of the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, your work, your intentions, your joys and your sorrows. From the moment when he had the idea of preparing this statue, the first Grand Chancellor frequently expressed the desire that, guided by the hands of Holy Mary, who had cared for God-made-Man, those who work and study in this University and the inhabitants of this whole regional Community would be led to a noble and strong love. His asked Holy Mary to foster in us a fair love, that is, a clean, generous, noble life that would enable us to love the Most Blessed Trinity, and to love and serve all souls, in marriage or in apostolic celibacy, each on the path that God has prepared for us. Amen.


Interview granted to the Alumni Magazine of the Instituto de Estudios Empresariales de Montevideo (IEEM), Uruguay (December, 2010)

Why did Opus Dei want to start a business school? And specifically, why in Uruguay?

The aim of the Prelature of Opus Dei is to assist the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church, fostering among Christians of all walks of life behavior consistent with their faith, by sanctifying their work and their ordinary life.

Naturally, the Prelature endeavors to give formation to its faithful—and also to others who desire it—so that each, with freedom and
personal responsibility, can contribute to the development of the Church and society. A member of Opus Dei has to make an effort to put his or her faith into practice and to bring forward, together with colleagues and friends, projects aimed at resolving the material and spiritual needs of their fellow citizens.

The IEEM initiative comes from the interest of some faithful of Opus Dei, Cooperators and friends, who saw a business school in Uruguay as a way to help foster upright behavior and professionalism in those who run businesses, and in the professional world in general.

I have a vivid memory of St. Josemaría Escrivá’s supernatural and human eagerness when urging forward initiatives such as this one, because he was very aware of the good that a School of Business Management, inspired by the spirit of the Gospel, could produce in society. He foresaw the development of an institution of great professional prestige, dedicated to the formation of managers and directors, who would put in first place service to others and the effort to imbue their work with a fully Christian and therefore truly human spirit.

Why in Uruguay? This initiative also comes from the desire of the faithful of Opus Dei in this country, and those who participate to its apostolates, to bring Christ’s message into daily activities and to serve all the people of Uruguay. Moreover, and for the same reasons, other social initiatives have also begun in Uruguay such as the Center for the Support of Integral Development (CADI [Centro de Apoyo al Desarrollo Integral]), the Los Pinos Educational Center (both located in Montevideo’s Casavalle district), and the Los Nogales and Las Camelias family farm schools, etc.

What do you see as the “space” for the Christian faith in the functions of management?

The Christian faith does not occupy “space;” it shouldn’t be confused with a book that contains a set of principles and truths, located next to others on a bookshelf. The faith provides a deeper knowledge of the world and of all human activities. With the radiance of the faith, the actions of a Christian take on a new dimension and unsuspected depths. The faith encourages a person to discover in all of one’s activities the guiding hand of God, who wants to make us sharers in his divine work (see St. Josemaría,
Being consistent with the faith in management doesn’t mean adding a new department of “Christian faith,” as though it was a matter of strategic or leadership skills added to various others. It saddened St. Josemaría to see that “many Christians are no longer convinced that the fullness of life that God rightly expects from his children means that they have to have a careful concern for the quality of their everyday work, because it is this work, even in its most minor aspects, which they have to sanctify... The work of each one of us, the activities that take up our time and energy, must be an offering worthy of our Creator. It must be operatio Dei, a work of God that is done for God: in short, a task that is complete and faultless” (Friends of God, 55). Those who are involved in management roles will not have the unity of life their faith requires if they make the fulfillment of their duties towards God an exclusively “personal” matter (even if they are generous in giving material assistance to apostolic initiatives), and fail to imbue their family, professional and social duties with the spirit of the Gospel.

As St. Josemaría said, the great daring of the Christian faith is to proclaim the value and dignity of human nature, and to insist that, through grace, we have been created to attain the dignity of God’s children. This same faith leads those involved in business not only to respect everyone (never manipulating them or trying to use them for selfish purposes), but also to love and respect the truth of each person, beginning with those closest to us, and to show our affection with specific acts of service. I recall that, in a dialogue with directors of a school of business management, one of those present asked St. Josemaría what the primary virtue of a businessman should be. His answer was centered on charity, “because justice alone isn’t enough.” The Founder of Opus Dei said that “the best way of living charity lies in generously outstripping the demands made on us by justice... Justice means giving to each his due. I would however go further and say that this is not enough. However much a particular person is due, we must be ready to give him more, because each single soul is a masterpiece of God’s making” (Ibid., 83).

A business manager, animated by Christian faith, will know how to seek justice and foster equitable labor relations. He will seek, in carrying out his work, the true good of people and not just perishable material
goods. The social doctrine of the Church tells us that economic activity should be aimed not merely at multiplying the goods produced, seeking only to increase profit or power; rather it should be ordained before all else to the service of persons, to the whole person and the entire human community (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2426).

The Christian faith, therefore, in providing a rich and rounded vision of the human being, not only is not foreign to business management, but it provides it with a truly humanizing perspective, attentive to the service of others, and opening new horizons.

You have visited Uruguay twice in the past; do you think that in a country where laicism has a strong influence, the principles of the social doctrine of the Church can take deep root?

Uruguay was born Catholic and its society has a clear Christian imprint. Certainly laicism has had a strong influence here, as in other places. Nevertheless, even among those without the gift of the faith, one finds ideals with Christian roots that are compatible with the principles of the Church’s social doctrine. We should never forget that these principles are an expression of the integral truth about man known by both reason and faith, and that, as has often been shown, they are a point of contact with persons who lack faith. I am referring, for example, to the fundamental equality among all human beings and the rejection of unjust discrimination; to the principle of solidarity, by which each diligently seeks the common good, that is, the good of each and every person, so that we are all truly responsible for everyone (see Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 193); and, especially, that we care for the poorest and most underprivileged in society (see John Paul II, Solicitude Rei Socialis, December 30, 1987, 42). This also includes trust in the freedom and responsibility of each person, reflected in the principles of participation and subsidiarity.

Therefore, Christians who act in accord with the principles of the Church’s social doctrine attract others, because their behavior answers to ideals that arise in the hearts of all men and women of good will. Above all, we Christians attract others because of our model, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world (Jn 8:12), and who came to bring redemption
from sin, to restore mankind to friendship with God, and to open the gates to eternal life.

As I said at the beginning, Uruguay was born Catholic, and has to continue being Catholic right to the end of time. Whether the principles of the Church’s social doctrine take root depends on Christians striving to know and put into practice the demands of the faith in their personal and social activities.

*What Christian grounds can you give for optimism to a world seeking to overcome economic crises and the suffering of many thousands of people?*

A Christian only has motives for optimism in any situation. Perhaps at times we let ourselves be led too much by a simply human outlook and we forget that God has taken on our human condition and become poor for us; that he wanted to suffer an agonizing death out of love for us, to rescue us from the bonds of sin, the only true evil, and thus gain for us eternal happiness. Then our vision is limited to the cross (with a small letter), to the sufferings we face, without remembering that the Cross (with a capital letter) brought salvation to the world, and that afterwards comes the Resurrection.

Crisis are opportunities for Christians to bring light and hope to others. Our faith leads us to be optimistic, and we should transmit that vision to those around us. Crises are overcome by prayer and by work. Christians should be an example for others by their upright action as citizens. Good example helps to overcome selfishness and utilitarianism, and replaces it with reciprocity and self-giving. It is true that the logic of the market is based on the interchange of goods. But “economic activity,” as Benedict XVI recalled in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, “cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial logic” (*Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, 36). The actions of the business manager, as a disciple of Christ, have to be imbued with charity, which will lead him or her not to “prescind from gratuitousness, which fosters and disseminates solidarity and responsibility for justice and the common good among the different economic players” (Ibid., 38).

I know that in the IEEM they are trying to give Uruguayans a good foundation in business methods, while also fostering a concern to resolve
the needs of the community. To assist development and combat poverty and corruption, a good moral formation is needed, which includes knowing the social doctrine of the Church, as well as a solid education in business methods. It also requires a constant effort to generate jobs and investment, to administer assets with honesty and transparency, to remunerate people with justice and generosity, and to work with the greatest perfection possible.

I recall how, when the first faithful of Opus Dei came to these beloved lands, they encountered many difficulties; their first living conditions were very poor, but they overcame the difficulties with faith in God and with work. The fruit of those first years is now clearly visible in the great variety of apostolic initiatives aimed at the integral development of Uruguayans, also thanks to the help and interest of many business people who have made generous commitments to these initiatives of Christian service to society.

Interview granted to the weekly Przewodnik Katolicki, Poland (November 14, 2010)

1. *Opus Dei* is a personal prelature—still the only one—of the Catholic Church. What is its uniqueness and how should its structure be understood? Is it necessary for today’s Church?

The Second Vatican Council created this new pastoral structure, the personal prelature, to give a greater dynamism to the Church’s work of evangelization. Opus Dei, formed by a Prelate, his presbyterate and lay faithful, men and women, makes its apostolic contribution—in communion with the Pope and bishops—by carrying out its proper mission: reminding people that all have been called by God to sanctity and to help them to respond to that call in the world, in their professional work and daily duties.

Opus Dei carries out this task throughout the world, and is universal in scope. But it is not an alternative to the work carried out in the dioceses.
Quite the contrary, it works in conjunction with the particular Churches. The fruit of the evangelizing work of those in the Prelature remains in the dioceses themselves. On the one hand because they themselves are faithful of the diocese in which they live; but also because, when they strive to increase the faith and spiritual life of their relatives and friends, when they spread the knowledge of Catholic doctrine, when they try to work with human perfection, they are participating directly in the task of evangelization of the particular Church in which they find themselves.

As regards the second part of your question. I can tell you that the Founder, St. Josemaría, used to say that Opus Dei was born in spite of himself. Personally he did not want to found anything. He was very clear that the initiative came from God. And when God brings forth a new path in the Church, he has his own plans. He counts on that path, as on so many others, to help many people find him in the middle of the world, through the Church. I often heard St. Josemaría say: “If Opus Dei weren’t here to serve the Church, it would be better to dissolve it. I would have no use for it!”

2. Opus Dei is now almost 82 years old and is closely united to the life and work of St. Josemaría Escrivá. Can you tell us about him? Your Excellency knew him personally. What was his path to sanctity like?

I can assure you that having lived close to him for twenty-five years was for me a great gift. To describe his personality and all that I learned from him would take a long time. I tried to do so, although very inadequately, in the book Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá. I can tell you succinctly, nevertheless, that his life was characterized by the desire to fulfill God’s will at every moment and in every activity. He desired not only to follow God’s indications, but also to maintain a continuous dialogue with him. He was, he liked to say, a contemplative in the middle of the world. He tried to put into practice what he said and wrote, from his youth, to the young workers and university students whom he directed spiritually: “May you seek Christ. May you find Christ. May you love Christ.” He sought God in his daily activities and while acting in an ordinary way, because to love and serve God, he used to say, we don’t have to do strange things. He advised us, for example, that from the place where we worked, we should let our heart escape to the nearest Tabernacle, to say a few words of affection to
our Lord, and that we shouldn’t be afraid to call him “my Jesus,” and to frequently show our love for him.

3. I’d like to follow up on that idea. St. Josemaría once said: “Since God wants the majority of Christians to remain in secular activities and to sanctify the world from within, the purpose of Opus Dei is to help them discover their divine mission, showing them that their human vocation—their professional, family, and social vocation—is not opposed to their supernatural vocation. On the contrary, it is an integral part of it” (Conversations, 60). This is a demanding piece of advice.

Benedict XVI reminded us recently that Christianity is not a comfortable path, but rather a difficult climb, illumined by Christ’s light and by the great hope that is born of him. The program that Christ presents to us in the Gospel entails living justice, loving everyone, pardoning those who offend us, fulfilling the commandments…. Christians are called to be exemplary citizens, exemplary professionals, whether working as a farmer, a craftsman, a journalist, or a Wall Street financier. At the same time, it is clear that we don’t become saints by our own strength, but because God helps us with his grace and often makes use of our own interests and longings to show us the divine value that these have if we season them with love for God.

4. How can one attain personal sanctity in this day and age?

It is a matter of allowing God to work and act in the soul of each and every person. Little by little our days begin to be filled with acts of love for God, acts of thanksgiving, asking him for forgiveness; and we find the strength to treat those around us with charity, to foster a climate of unity, to put great care into the small details of our professional work. To attain this goal we have to dedicate some time each day exclusively to God, coming to see how much we need him to make up for our own weakness. Holy Mass, confession and prayer are, therefore, absolutely necessary in our struggle to attain sanctity, because while increasing our desires to reach heaven, they confer on us the grace to accomplish it. Holiness is a gift, a task, and a goal. God wants us to be happy, very happy, not only in heaven, but also here on earth.
5. Being a member of Opus Dei also means sanctifying one's work, doing apostolate, praying, and living a Eucharistic life. That's quite a bit. What, in your opinion, does holiness in daily life come down to?

I will sum it up with this expression from St. Josemaría: “to struggle for love right till the last moment.” People often asked him: And what can you say to those of us who are married? To those who work on a farm? To widows? And to young people? He would answer that he had only one serving pot, and remind them that Jesus preached the Gospel for all men and women, without any distinctions. As he once said: “He calls each and every one to holiness; he asks each and every one to love him: young and old, single and married, healthy and sick, learned and unlearned, no matter where they work, or where they are. There is only one way to become more familiar with God, to increase our trust in him. We must come to know him through prayer; we must speak to him and show him, through a heart to heart conversation, that we love him” (Homily “Towards Holiness” in Friends of God, 294).

6. Today, Opus Dei is made up of members from dozens of different countries. Does this path continue to be an attractive one for the people of today who seem to have lost their way?

What is attractive is to know Christ; Opus Dei is only an instrument. Today there are many good people, many more than we might imagine. We priests, as well as many men and women who endeavor to spread the Gospel, discover every day, in so many countries, the joy that is born in people when they come to know Christ, when they receive the gift of conversion. Our work as Christians is to show them by our example and friendship the beauty of the Christian life and the possibility of living it in the ordinary circumstances of each day: at work, in one’s family, through social relationships.

In this regard, St. Josemaría wrote: “I often feel like crying out to so many men and women in offices and shops, in the world of the media and in the law courts, in schools, on the factory floor, in mines and on farms and telling them that, with the backing of an interior life and by means of the Communion of Saints, they ought to be bringing God into all these different environments, according to that teaching of the Apostle: Glorify
God by making your bodies the shrines of his presence” (The Forge, no. 945).

7. I have had the opportunity to meet various members of Opus Dei in Poland and others who moved here from Madrid. They are wonderful people who always live with a great hope...

The faithful of Opus Dei realize very clearly, as I have often said, we are not better than others nor “at the head of the class.” Each knows his or her own defects and tries to struggle to correct them. At the same time, I’m grateful for what you just told me, and want you to know that I too often give thanks to God for the witness of Christian consistency that I receive from faithful of the Prelature as well as from so many cooperators and friends.

In our effort to follow Christ in the middle of the world we are not alone: we count on the help of so many people who pray for the Prelature’s apostolates throughout the whole world, and also of numerous cloistered religious who without being part of Opus Dei—which is characterized by secularity—offer us this marvelous help. Therefore I now dare to ask you and all who read these words of mine to remember to pray for the faithful of the Work and for the fruit of each one’s apostolic efforts.

8. Who can be a member of Opus Dei?

There is room for everyone in Opus Dei: priests and laity, men and women; the married, single, and widows; healthy and sick; poor people and the rich; all those who, sensing the divine call to seek holiness amid earthly realities, are determined to fulfill God’s will. We love the religious with our whole heart, but we don’t draw them away from their path.

9. The diocese of Bydgoszcz is one of the newest in Poland. We are happy that Opus Dei is blossoming here slowly from the divine seed. How does your Excellency see the future of this community in our country and what challenges does it face in Poland and in the world?

A sign of our Founder’s great faith was to ask many of the first faithful of the Work, if they freely wanted to, to go to work in various countries of the world, in order to begin—with their professional work and through that work—spreading the spirit of Opus Dei in those places. I say a sign of
his faith, in the first place, because he felt sure that the fruit would come, but also because he sent those people without any financial means—since he didn’t have any. He could only offer them his blessing and an image of our Lady. I tell you this because the apostolate of Opus Dei has always begun small and with few resources. Thanks be to God in this land of Poland the apostolic work is spreading. I ask God, through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God John Paul II, who so strongly encouraged Don Álvaro del Portillo to begin working for souls in this country, that Poland may continue giving witness to its faith, also in the middle of the world. I am convinced that with the passage of time, many Polish men and women will also be those who begin the work of Opus Dei in other countries, just as people from other places have done recently in Indonesia, Romania, and Korea.

Address at the inauguration of the academic year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (October 4, 2010)

Distinguished authorities,

Professors, students, and all who work at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross,

Ladies and gentlemen:

Today the new academic year begins. For the newly arrived students it is truly a new experience; for the others, perhaps, it is only a new beginning.

All of us need to infuse renewed commitment into our work, in order to join faith and reason closely together. You might think that this task is exclusive to theologians, but that isn’t the case. Both the theological perspective and the rational one can mark any task facing the academic, whether it be directive, administrative, or technical. I would like, therefore,
to focus on one aspect of “unity of life,” a topic Saint Josemaría Escrivá was a great master of.

1. University study and research always aim at the truth, a full, definitive truth. As Benedict XVI, drawing on his personal experience, asked, “What is the university? What is its task? … I think one could say that the true origin of the university lies in the thirst for knowledge that is found in all mankind. Each person wants to know what everything around him is. He wants to know the truth.”[1]

This task is almost a superhuman one, because the truth is present in all spheres of knowledge. Human reason is called to undertake a marvelous but unending endeavor to bring the truth to light. A scholar working alone can easily lose his way (and experience teaches us that this risk is not a theoretical one). As a result, it is indispensable that many people work together, forming a Universitas magistrorum et scholarium, constituted not from a single university, but from many.

2. The horizons of truth transcend the strength of reason, as the Holy Father teaches: “Reason also understands and discovers that, in addition to what it has already attained and achieved, there exists a truth that it will never be able to discover based solely on itself, but only receive as a gift freely given.”[2] Reason stands in need of faith, which “purifies and exalts reason, thereby enabling it to broaden its horizons in order to enter into a field of research as unfathomably expansive as mystery itself.”[3]

A purely theoretical faith is not sufficient, because the mystery that faith elevates reason to confront is not an intellectual abstraction, but a personal reality: God, One and Triune, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, who carries out his work of salvation throughout human history, and enters into it so as to become, with the incarnation of the Son, the center of history itself, the history of salvation.

We need, rather, an authentic faith, summed up in Saint Paul’s incisive phrase: a faith working through love (Gal 5: 6). Without charity, knowledge is in danger of becoming empty verbiage, employed in a dialectical game, like those who want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. (1
Tim 1:7). For they have lost the love that issues from a pure heart and a
good conscience and sincere faith (1 Tim 1: 5).

3. Not all university faculties explicitly cultivate knowledge of the
mystery of God, but all can benefit from the faith, which purifies reason.
For reason loses its way not only when it strays beyond the evidence at
hand, but also when it is driven by the desire for self-affirmation, by
selfishness and economic interests, by the lust for power, superficiality,
intemperance, etc. Whoever is committed to higher education, at whatever
level, must guard against these assaults that corrupt reason. Ever since the
disorder of sin entered into human history, the best defense against the
germs that undermine reason is found in faith working through love.

Faith fosters the proper use of reason, and reason, for its part, helps us
to receive the light of faith, opening the eyes of our intellect, not because
faith is obscure, but in order to carry out the exhortation of St. Peter:
Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the
reason for the hope that you have (1 Pet 3: 15). Thus the spirit of dialogue
and service to the truth, ever indispensable in university work, will be
strengthened, and the mistaken outlook Vatican II warned of,
unfortunately quite widespread today, will be overcome: “This split
between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be
counted among the more serious errors of our age.”[4]

4. Saint Josemaría, in a homily given at the University of Navarre,
age us forcefully to seek unity of life in our own lives: “We cannot lead a
double life. We cannot have a split personality, if we want to be Christians.
There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has
to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover
the invisible God in the most visible and material things.”[5]

The marriage between faith and reason must not remain confined to
the intimacy of the human spirit, because it embraces the whole person, of
which our body is an integral part, and should lead to manifesting our
knowledge in our outward behavior.

The unity between reason and faith, then, means uniting thought and
action, teaching and example, as the Holy Father said recently, in the vigil
for the Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman: “Truth is passed on
not merely by formal teaching, important as that is, but also by the witness of lives lived in integrity, fidelity, and holiness.”[6]

5. University professors are not the only ones who have to aspire to this inner harmony. Students as well must seek it, although it requires great effort and commitment. It is an effort that should be imbued with a sporting spirit and optimism: especially optimism, because faith is a gift from God, and he is infinitely generous. Reason is, first of all, God’s gift to human nature. It doesn’t matter if we often experience the limits of our reasoning powers and wish we were smarter. We can find comfort in the words of St. James: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind (Jas 1: 5–6).

Faith assures us of God’s help, but ordinarily he counts on our assiduous and self-sacrificing effort, which will lead you to raise your eyes to new and higher aims when you are studying.

What are some examples of these? We can cite here a point from The Way, a book by St. Josemaría that has opened up broad horizons to millions of readers worldwide: “You ask me: why that wooden Cross? — And I copy from a letter: ‘As I look up from the microscope, my sight comes to rest on the cross—black and empty. That Cross without its Crucified is a symbol. It has a meaning which others cannot see. And though I am tired out and on the point of abandoning the job, I once again bring my eyes to the lens and continue: for the lonely Cross is calling for a pair of shoulders to bear it.’”[7]

Now replace the word “microscope” with “book” or “handouts,” and you will see how relevant this consideration in The Way continues to be for your work in the university.

6. I mentioned above the importance of a “sporting spirit” in striving to unite faith and reason. The curriculum of university studies to obtain an academic degree can call to mind the long workouts needed to succeed in sport competitions. The comparison with sports is nothing new. Saint Paul said: So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I
discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1 Cor 9: 26-27).

Two decades ago, our first Chancellor, the beloved Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, in the homily at a Mass for the inauguration of the academic year, exhorted us: “Dear friends, this period of study is meant to provide intellectual light; but it is also a time to grow in one’s life of faith. It would be sad if the academic training were at the expense of one’s life of piety and apostolic zeal.”[8]

A university’s success is due precisely to the combined and persevering effort of everyone. Faith has an important role also in the administrative and technical tasks. What is this role? These words of St. Josemaría, contained in a homily on work, can guide us: “I give you my word that if we make a daily effort to see our personal duties in this light, that is, as a divine summons, we will learn to carry them through to completion with the greatest human and supernatural perfection of which we are capable.”[9]

As he said in another context: “Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love. We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort. Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises. We have been rightly told, In eating, in drinking, in all that you do, do everything for God’s glory” (1 Cor 10, 31).[10]

If we truly strive to unite our faith and our intellect, we will act with the unity of life proper to the children of God, both on days that are more serene, and on those that are more “agitated,” when it seems that everything is going wrong. If we always realize that we are guided by the loving hand of our Father in heaven, and that He is very close to each one of us, we will know how to smile and spread around us an atmosphere of peace that makes everyone’s work pleasant, although our work requires great effort and tires us out.

Let us often look with love at the images of our Lady, Mother of God and our Mother, that are so easy to find in this building. And then it will be even easier for us to spread around us the joy and peace that we all desire.
With this wish for all, I declare the 2010-2011 academic year opened.


[2] Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to participants on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the publication of Pope John Paul II’s encyclical Fides et Ratio.

[3] Ibid.


Future of the Year for Priests, L’Osservatore Romano, the Vatican (August 21, 2010)

“The Future of the Year for Priests”

The Year for Priests concluded this past June 16th. The topic is still quite a timely one, and challenges each of us to reflect on what the Church has sought to attain by convoking it. Therefore we can ask: What has happened in this Year of the Priesthood? What impact has it had on us priests, called by the Roman Pontiff to spend this year reflecting on that exemplary brother of ours, St. Jean Marie Vianney?
As Benedict XVI wrote in his letter of convocation, “This year seeks to contribute to promoting a commitment to interior renovation of all priests, so that their Gospel witness in the world might be more intense and incisive.” He also cited some words that the Curé of Ars frequently repeated and that the Catechism of the Catholic Church has recalled: “the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.” To understand who he is, a priest needs to consider more than his pastoral tasks; he has to reach much further, to Christ, whose humanity reveals to us the fullness of Trinitarian life and in whom this Life is offered to all mankind.

It is only from this perspective that we can understand some other words of St. Jean Marie Vianney, cited by the Roman Pontiff: the priest “will not understand himself except in heaven.” Only in heaven, on seeing the infinite and ineffable gift of God’s self-giving to mankind, will the priest savor who he truly is. God not only wanted to communicate himself to mankind; he took on our very nature in Christ Jesus; he instituted the Church and called specific men whom, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, he made his ministers and instruments. The Pope asks us to reflect on the “audacity of God,” who “conscious of our weaknesses, nonetheless considers men capable of acting and being present in his stead,” who trusts in us to the point of “abandoning himself into our hands.” That audacity is the “grandeur concealed in the word ‘priesthood’” (Benedict XVI, Homily at the closing of the Year for Priests).

During this year, through the Pope’s homilies, letters and allocutions, in celebrations, meetings for reflection, and days of prayer, these great truths have been repeated throughout the world, calling everyone, and especially priests, to a new, deep and joyful conversion. For it is impossible to savor the excess of divine love that the priesthood entails, without feeling personally committed to be—as St. Josemaría used to say—“one hundred percent priests” (Homily A Priest Forever, April 13, 1973).

What does this phrase mean? A full answer to this question would require a long exposition on the theology and spirituality of the priesthood. Here I will limit myself to highlighting three key ideas:

a) It asks for a deep awareness of the dignity of the priesthood, of the value and richness that is implied by that status, so that it permeates all of
one’s conduct, and endows with authenticity every moment of our life, with
the certainty that, in spite of our littleness, Christ wants to make use of us
to communicate to mankind the fruit of his redemptive work.

b) It calls for the priest to identify himself with Christ, to nourish his
“same sentiments” (see Phil 2:5), to die to himself so that Christ dwells in
him (see Gal 2:20); it requires being a man of the Eucharist, living the
Holy Mass with the faith that each celebration perpetuates the sacrifice of
Christ, who died and rose again, and who comes to his Church to draw us
to Himself and to lead us with the Spirit to filial intimacy with God the
Father.

c) It requires an eagerness to serve joyfully, cum gaudio, in Christ and
for Christ, serving one’s own flock, the Church and all men and women.
Thus in our heart, as in Christ’s, there will be no room for selfishness or for
indifference in the face of others’ needs. It entails dedicating oneself with
determination, although it may cost us great effort, to whatever contributes
to the good of souls, with a charity shown in deeds, and to preaching the
Word of God and to the sacrament of reconciliation where, in the name of
and with the authority of Christ, priests grant the divine gift of forgiveness.

The Year for Priests has reminded us of what is eternal: God’s love,
which never passes away or ceases, but is always young and active. And of
the marvelous reality that this love, made visible in Christ Jesus, becomes
known through the Church, through every Christian, and through each
priest. The Year for Priests will undoubtedly produce many rich fruits in
preaching, in catechesis, in care for the liturgy, in the various fields of
pastoral work, and especially in the interior renewal of each priest, reflected
in the growth of the number of seminarians in the diocese. The “audacity
of God” that Benedict XVI spoke about in his homily on June 11 convokes
all of us, as the Roman Pontiff stressed, to answer Him personally,
“awaiting our yes.”

+ Javier Echevarría

Prelate of Opus Dei
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Other news

Camino de Santiago

Palas de Rei, one of the towns through which the “Way of St. James” passes, organized an exhibit entitled “St. Josemaría: life, message and legacy.” The exhibit was meant to provide information on the spiritual meaning of the pilgrims’ route to Santiago de Compostela, through the message of the universal call to holiness reflected in the life and teachings of St. Josemaría. It also helped to make the saint known to those living in the locality. More than 2,000 pilgrims from thirty countries visited the exhibit.

Basilica of San Miguel

When St. Josemaría arrived in Madrid as a young priest, he celebrated his first Mass in the Basilica of San Miguel, on April 20, 1927. On October 17, 1960, 33 years later, he returned to celebrate Mass in the same church, this time with the participation of many people who knew him from his writings but had never seen him in person. In his homily he said: “I want to speak a few words to you in this church where I had the joy of celebrating my first Mass in Madrid. I wouldn’t have dreamed that I would one day see this church filled with souls who love Jesus Christ so greatly.” In 2010, the fiftieth anniversary of that Mass was commemorated in a solemn Mass celebrated by the Apostolic Nuncio in Spain, Archbishop Renzo Fratini. In his homily, the Archbishop emphasized the importance of the celebration of the Eucharist for the life of a priest: “Who came to this Basilica? A holy priest who had a specific vocation. And, why did he come? He came, in short, to direct to God the highest prayer that exists in all creation: the Holy Mass.”

Fourth audiovisual competition “Communicating Africa”

For the fourth time, the “Communicating Africa” prize has been granted for documentaries and video clips that best reflect the true richness of the African continent. The award was won by the documentary “Yel Kabeye, women and the future of Ouagadougou,” produced by the Federation of Christian Organizations for International Volunteer Service. The aim of the prize is to help make known the real difficulties, successes
and positive experiences of Africans who are dedicating their efforts to building a better society. The award ceremony took place on November 12 in the City Hall in Rome, with the participation of Ugo Tramballi, a journalist from the newspaper “Il Sole 24 ore”; Msgr. Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Chief of Protocol for the Vatican Secretariate of State; Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia, a university professor; Igiaba Scega, a writer; and Sonia D'Ottavio, journalist for RAI, the Italian TV network.

“St. Josemaría Escrivá” Conference on the Arts

This initiative began in 2009 at the Moncloa Student Residence in Madrid. Each year a figure from the humanities whose work reflects Christian and human values is invited to speak. In this second annual session, the Spanish writer Blanca Garcia-Valdecasas spoke on “The Art of Writing.” A disciple of the renowned poet and literary critic Damaso Alonso, she is one of the most distinctive Spanish voices in the contemporary narrative tradition. “Inspiration,” she said, “is a spark of the intellect that requires hard work.”

Pathways of freedom

“St. Josemaría Escrivá during the Spanish Civil War” was the title of an address by Rev. Benito Badrinas given in Seu de Urgell, Spain. His address focused on some of the main historical events of the Founder of Opus Dei’s passage through the Pyrenees during the Spanish Civil War. The session was part of the Fourth Conference of Pathways to Freedom, organized by the Association of Friends of the Pallerols Trail from Rialb to Andorra. Through these meetings, the sponsors hope to contribute to the fostering of peace among all peoples, independent of their viewpoints and ways of thinking. It is also seeks to pay homage to those who, like St. Josemaría, were unjustly persecuted and to so many others who are currently suffering persecution because of their religion or ideas.

St. Josemaría in a church in São Paulo

On July 20, Bishop Javier Echevarría, during his trip to Brazil, blessed some tiles with an image of St. Josemaría in the church of Our Lady of Brazil, in São Paulo. Accompanying the image are phrases taken from the works of the Founder of Opus Dei which reflect central aspects of the charism he received from God in 1928. The walls of the church are also
adorned with scenes from the history of the evangelization of Brazil and the Americas. Participating in the ceremony were Msgr. Vicente Ancona Lopez, the Vicar of Opus Dei in Brazil, Rev. Michelino Roberto, the pastor, and the parochial vicars, along with a large group of faithful.

An icon of St. Josemaría

An icon of St. Josemaría has been painted (or “written,” as is said regarding icons) by the Orthodox artist Alexandre Sokolov. The artist has also produced well-known icons of St. Raphael and of the Eucharistic Virgin—with the Child depicted within a chalice. The icon of St. Josemaría is found in one of the centers of Opus Dei in Moscow and contains these words, in Russian: “God calls all men and women to holiness. Every honorable task can be an instrument for sanctifying oneself and others.” As is customary in the iconographic tradition, the gilded background represents eternity. Above St. Josemaría are two angels with the Blessed Virgin and Child between them.

Other new publications

New editions of works of St. Josemaría


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**Books about St. Josemaría**


Polish edition of this biography of St. Josemaría, 362 pages.


Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Mysli sw. Josemarii na kazdydzien, Poznan, Swiety Wojciech, 2010. First edition, 400 pages. “Thoughts” for each day of the year, in Polish, extracted from the works of St. Josemaría. This is the third in a series; the first two volumes collected phrases from Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

A copy of The Way for the miners trapped in Chile

The 33 miners who were trapped in Chile at a depth of some 2,200 feet received 33 prayer cards of our Lady and of St. Josemaría and scapular medals of our Lady of Mt. Carmel, together with a small copy of Camino (The Way). Several people with devotion to St. Josemaría came up with this idea. The big problem was the size of the book, since normal sized copies
did not fit into the metal cylinders that brought food and medicine down to the miners. Finally someone donated an especially small edition, published many years earlier in Argentina, which met the size and weight requirements.

The Founder among the streets of Italy

St. Josemaría has a street or plaza dedicated to him in many localities in Italy. In the past six months, the municipalities of Marano, Teramo, and Pescara have been added to this list. In Terama, the local authorities dedicated a plaza to him situated at the entrance to the university. In Pescara, the mayor of the city, Luigi Albores Mascia, recalled that the Founder of Opus Dei had stayed there during the summer of 1967. “St. Josemaría,” he said, “is the ‘saint of ordinary life,’ as Pope Wojtyla described him. A saint for whom order, cheerfulness, laboriousness and determination were very important.” In Marano, the dedication of a plaza to St. Josemaría was the result of the initiative of several people from that city.

The Feast of St. Josemaría in the Maronite Liturgical Calendar

The Feast of St. Josemaría has appeared for the first time in the Maronite liturgical calendar. This calendar, which the diocese provides for its priests, shows the Mass to be celebrated each day, with the divine office and a list of the saints that are commemorated in the diocese on that day. Starting this year, St. Josemaría appears on the page for June 26th.
A symposium in Jaén on “St. Josemaría and Youth”

The Catalina Mir Foundation has been holding an annual symposium dedicated to the message that St. Josemaría transmitted to the 21st century generations. The inaugural ceremony for this year’s event took place on November 19, led by the Mayor of Jaén, Carmen Peñalver.

An audience of more than 700 people attended, eager to learn more about the teachings of the saint. The first conference was given by the Psychiatrist Enrique Rojas Montes: “Educating means attracting by values.” The philosopher Jaime Nubiola encouraged those attending to “flee from the fear of thinking.” The roundtables opened up a broad array of topics. Among other speakers, the writer Miguel Aranguren told of his experience in editing stories; the architect Elisa Valero spoke about “dangerous idleness”; the actor Santi Rodríguez, well known to Spanish TV viewers, defended the importance of standing up as a Christian among one’s friends; while Diego Poole, Professor of Law, made the audience laugh by recalling his performance as a clown in an audience with John Paul II.

On November 20th the symposium was concluded by Cardinal Julian Herranz and the Vicar of Opus Dei for Eastern Andalusia, Fr. Antonio Luque. Cardinal Herranz’s talk was entitled “God and Daring: a Saint who was Always Young,” while “Through the Mountains” was the title chosen by Fr. Antonio for his presentation.

The Sound of Water: The Stay of St. Josemaría in Burgos

*El rumor del agua. Recorrido histórico de San Josemaría in Burgos* (Cobel 2010, 131 pages) is the title of a book introduced on October 6, 2010, the eighth anniversary of his canonization as a saint.

Its author, María Jesús Coma, looks at the years 1938 and 1939, when
the Founder of Opus Dei lived in this city together with some of the first faithful of the Work.

St. Josemaría was living in Madrid when the fierce religious persecution broke out in the capital and in many other cities of Spain in 1936. In those circumstances, he found it impossible to carry out Opus Dei, which God had entrusted to him on October 2, 1928. Therefore, together with some faithful of the Work, he decided to try to reach the part of Spain that was free of religious persecution. They crossed the Pyrenees on foot at the end of 1937 and reached Andorra. Then, after journeying through France, they crossed the border into Spain at Irún. The Founder found a place to live in Burgos, where he finished writing The Way, his best known work. He also dedicated many hours to research on his thesis (for a doctorate in law), on the quasi-episcopal jurisdiction of the Abbess of Las Huelgas.

The book includes testimonies from people who had contact with St. Josemaría during those years in Burgos.

Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer at the Royal Foundation of St. Elizabeth of Madrid (1931-1945)

Beatriz Comella Gutiérrez is the author of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer en el Real Patronato de Santa Isabel de Madrid (1931-1945). This is the third work in the collection of monographs brought out by the Instituto Historico San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer and published by Rialp.

This 408 page volume looks at the priestly work of Josemaría Escrivá as interim chaplain for the Augustinian Recollects of the Convent of St. Elizabeth between 1931 and 1934, and as Rector-Administrator of the Foundation of St. Elizabeth from 1934 to 1945. This Foundation was formed by three entities: the Convent of St. Elizabeth, a rectoral [i.e. non-parochial] Church, and the Royal College of Santa Isabel-La Asunción. The work provides historical context for St. Josemaría's priestly activity,
with many facts about the illustrious history of both the Convent and the Royal College.

A study in spiritual theology: Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de San Josemaría

Ernst Burkhart and Javier Lopez Diaz are the authors of Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de San Josemaría [Daily Life and Sanctity in the Teaching of St. Josemaría] (Rialp, 624 pages). The first of three projected volumes, this wide-ranging study seeks to explain and systematize, through the method of spiritual theology, the teachings of St. Josemaría on Christian life.

This first volume opens with a preliminary part on the cultural and theological context in which the message that St. Josemaría preached by special divine providence was born and developed. This was a message rooted in the Church’s tradition, while at the same time containing the novelty of a lay and secular spirituality. In this preliminary part the basic concepts needed to understand his teaching are also presented, and ample space is given to his teaching on the universal call to holiness.

After these preliminary points have been clarified, the authors turn to the first part of their systematic exposition, focusing on the final aim of Christian life. St. Josemaría expressed this aim in the following words: “We have to give all the glory to God... and for that we want Christ to reign... and a demand of his glory and of his reign is that all, with Peter, go to Jesus through Mary” (Instruction, March 19, 1934, cited on page 247 of this volume).

To give glory to God, trying to be contemplatives in the midst of the world; seeking Christ’s reign, placing him at the center of all human activities; and cooperating with the Holy Spirit in the building up of the Church through sanctification and apostolate, making the Eucharist the center and root of one’s own life: these are the central themes of the three chapters of this first part dedicated to Christian life. St. Josemaría
understood very well that the great aim of giving glory to God goes hand in hand with one’s daily small occupations.

The remaining two volumes, currently in process of being published, look at the identification of the Christian with Christ (volume 2 on divine filiation, freedom, charity and other key Christian virtues); and the ordinary path of sanctification in secular and civic activities (volume 3 on sanctification of professional work and of family and social realities). The work ends with a reflection on the value of the teachings of St. Josemaría for theology, reflecting on some words of Cardinal Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, in a theological congress on the saint’s message.

The study includes abundant bibliography and is well documented with many quotes from the writings of St. Josemaría and other texts from his oral preaching.

Blessing of the first stone of the Parish of St. Josemaría in Alcorcón, Madrid

On June 26th, the dies natalis of St. Josemaría, the Bishop of Getafe, Most Rev. Joaquín Maria Lopez de Andujar celebrated Mass in Madrid’s Fuenllana high school and afterwards blessed the first stone of a parish church dedicated to St. Josemaría.

The Mass was attended by many families from the Andel and Fuenllana schools, both corporate apostolic works of Opus Dei, as well as by people from the nearby areas of Alcorcón, Getafe, Móstoles, Leganés, Fuenlabrada, and Pinto.

After finishing Mass, the Bishop, accompanied by the pastor and many of the families present, went to the land where the new church will be situated. “We pray,” he said, directing himself to St. Josemaría, “that this stone we are placing here today will be the source of many living stones for the good of the Church.”
The stone, circular in shape, has an opening in the center for a small urn containing a document commemorating the blessing and placing of the first stone together with the names of the 154 children baptized since the establishment of the new parish and some 40 children who received their first communion this year. Also placed there were some current newspapers and coins, a prayer card with a relic of St. Josemaría and a medallion commemorating the canonization of the church’s patron saint.

On November 1, 2008, the town council of Alcorcón ceded a piece of land for the construction of this church and within the year the project was definitively approved by the municipality and the diocese.

The new parish is situated on Copenhagen Street, between Rey Juan Carlos University and the Alcorcón Hospital, in a young neighborhood that now numbers more than 20,000 people.

Santo Rosario: Publication of the Critical-Historical Edition

The critical-historical study of *The Way*, by the theologian Fr. Pedro Rodríguez, was the first of the critical-historical editions of the writings of the founder of Opus Dei to appear. These are being published under the title of *The Complete Works of St. Josemaría*. Now the same author, together with two other theologians at the University of Navarra, Fr. Javier Sesé and Fr. Constantino Áñchel, has published the critical-historical edition of *Santo Rosario* (Rialp, 370 pages). Like the study of *The Way*, this book seeks to deepen the reader’s understanding of the content of the work, focusing on its context, the author’s intention, the sources used, etc. The prologue is by Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei.

St. Josemaría wrote *Holy Rosary* in 1931, probably on December 6th, next to the sanctuary of St. Elizabeth, “in one go” as he used to say. When the 4th edition was planned in 1945, an attractive pocket book with drawings by Luis Borobio, the author decided to make some textual additions to most of the mysteries in order to mesh well with the drawings.
The new texts are mostly Biblical passages that were added while leaving intact what was written in 1931. In this book, St. Josemaría “speaks about God in a way that the human heart grasps immediately,” says Fr. Rodríguez, paraphrasing Romano Guardini.

Videos about St. Josemaría

The splendor of holiness

The Santa Chiara club has produced an Italian-language series of videos about saints entitled The Splendor of Holiness. The one dedicated to St. Josemaría bears the title Josemaría Escrivá, lo splendore del divino nel quotidiano [Josemaría Escrivá, the splendor of the divine in daily life]. The narrator is a discalced Carmelite, Antonio Sicari; the program includes testimonies by professionals in various fields. It was broadcast by the Italian television network Rete4, on June 27, 2010, and went on sale in Italian stores and kiosks in December.

A saint in the Spanish civil war

The Information Office of the Prelature of Opus Dei in the United States has produced two brief videos of an historical character about St. Josemaría. The videos are found on the new YouTube channel of Opus Dei. The first one, Who was Josemaría Escrivá? sketches his life, while the second, Josemaría Escrivá in the Spanish Civil War, is centered on the experiences of St. Josemaría in the years 1936-1939, when he had to spend many months in hiding in Madrid and later crossed the Pyrenees to the part of Spain free of religious persecution.

Paul VI at Centro Elis

A video of Pope Paul VI’s visit to Centro Elis in 1965. “Tutto qui è Opus Dei” [Here everything is Opus Dei], Paul VI told Josemaría Escrivá during his visit to the Elis school of formation in Rome. This center in a poor district of Rome, where thousands of young people have acquired professional formation, arose at the desire of John XXIII. The video with the filming of the Holy Father’s visit is available in full on www.opusdei.it.
News
Leercamino.org: a webpage on The Way

The leercamino.org web page began in 2009, on the 70th anniversary of the publication of Camino [The Way]. Its goal is to make the book better known to a greater number of people and encourage a deeper and more enriching reading of it.

The section “The Way Point by Point” contains the 999 points of The Way, accompanied by videos of St. Josemaría, and video-testimonies from people all over the world who talk about the influence this book has had on their lives. It also provides clarification of some terms used, cultural references, etc.

The section “Pedro Rodríguez: edición critico-historica” offers the comments about each of the 999 points of The Way that the theologian Pedro Rodrigo presented in the third edition of the Critical-Historical Study published by Rialp.

New Centers of the Prelature

The Regional Vicars have established new Centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Cizur Menor, Spain; Florianopolis, Brazil; Le Pecq, France; Madrid, Spain; Seville, Spain; and Tarragona, Spain.

Errata: In no. 49, we failed to mention the new Center in Surahammar, Sweden.

Some diocesan assignments entrusted to priests of the Prelature

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.
Pontifical appointments

On June 19, 2010, Fr. Fernando Monaj Abadia was appointed Chaplain to His Holiness.

On August 26, 2010, Msgr. Klaus Martin Becker was appointed Prelate of Honor of His Holiness.


On September 27, 2010, Rev. Juan José Silvestre was appointed Consultor for the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

On October 5, 2010, Pilar Lara Alén, President of the Foundation for the Promotion of Culture (Spain), was named Auditor of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, which took place from October 10 to 14, 2010.

On October 9, 2010, Msgr. Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, was ordained a bishop. His episcopal appointment was made public on September 15, 2010, naming him titular bishop of Tapso.

On October 16, 2010, Rev. Jaime Rafael Fuentes Martín was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Minas (Uruguay). He was ordained a bishop on November 28, 2010.

On October 26, 2010, Rev. Enrique Colom Costa was named as Prelate Counsellor for the Apostolic Penitentiary.

On December 30, 2010, Msgr. Osvaldo Neves de Almeida was
appointed to the College of Prelates of the Apostolic Camera.

Errata:

The following appointments were inadvertently omitted earlier: Rev. Michele Diaz, Chaplain to His Holiness on November 21, 2008. Rev. José Luis Gutiérrez Gómez, Honorary Protonotary Apostolic on March 20, 2009.

New publications

Video: *Construir la familia* [Building the Family]

“Building the Family” is the title of this Spanish language video of 33 minutes that echoes the teachings of St. Josemaría on family life through the testimonies of various families: love between the spouses, the upbringing of children, God in the family. Carried out by Juan Martin Ezratty of *Digito Identidad*, the video is at the disposition of the public on the internet.

Other new items

The Milan publisher Ares has published *Vivere la Santa Messa*, the Italian translation of the latest book by Bishop Javier Echevarría, which we described in our previous issue under the Spanish title: *Vivir la Santa Misa*. The book has also been published in French: *Vivre la Sainte Messe*, by Le Laurier.


Homage of the University of Navarra to Professor Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri, on the centennial of his birth

On November 26, the University of Navarra held a ceremony in honor of Professor Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri, medical internist at the University of Navarra Hospital and Professor in the School of Medicine, who died in 1985. The ceremony, on the centennial of his birth, was presided over by the Rector of the University, Professor Angel J. Gómez-Montoro, who recalled “his passionate love for the university.” The Rector said that “his magnanimity and his love for the university are a true spur to us to continue working ardently to carry forward this great university project.”
The homage began with an address by Manuel Pérez Miranda, Professor of Medical Pathology at the University of Badajoz, on “The Evolution of Internal Medicine in the Past Fifty Years.”

A round table moderated by Dr. Jesús Prieto, professor at the University of Navarre and a specialist in the Department of Internal Medicine, was then held. Taking part were Dr. Manuel Muñoz, Head of Internal Medicine for the Hospital Complex of León; Dr. Jesús Florez, Professor of Pharmacology at the University of Cantabria; and two professors from the University of Navarra, Andrés Purroy, specialist in Nephrology, and Gonzalo Herranz, Professor of Bioethics.

Dr. Manuel Muñoz said that Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri was “a true promoter of all that today is the University of Navarra's Medical School. He encouraged all who were at his side to work with disinterested dedication, placing the patient above all else.”

According to Dr. Jesús Florez, generosity was his great legacy as a teacher. This gave him “a passion for medicine, for the sick, for us his students, for science, and for clinical research.”

Professor Gonzalo Herranz said that Dr. Ortiz’ main concern “was to foster in himself, in those he worked with and in his students intellectual humility: a recognition that their diagnoses could always have been better or more complete. And he wanted this humility to spur them to continue studying, not just in order to know more, but to serve their patients better.”

Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri was born in Segovia in 1910. He came to the new School of Medicine at the University of Navarra and the University Hospital in 1958, and received many awards during his long years of service to medicine. In 1983 he left teaching and worked for the Association of Friends of the University. A short time later he was diagnosed with a cancerous tumor that resulted in his death in 1985. Thirteen years later, his cause of canonization was begun in Pamplona.

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Appointment of Jack Valero as spokesman for the Beatification of Cardinal Newman during the Pope's trip to the United Kingdom

Jack Valero, who is in charge of the information office of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Great Britain, was named by the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales as spokesman for the Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman, celebrated by the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, on September 19 in Cofton Park, Birmingham, before some 70,000 people.

In an interview on September 23, Valero spoke about the preparation for the Pope's visit from the point of view of communication concerns and how the group called Catholic Voices came about, in order to respond to the demand for information from journalists, and of which he was one of the founders. “I think that in the future,” he said, “the Church will be able to make its message reach much further if training courses are organized for lay people who have a knack for communicating. One might say that we have to discover the vocation of communicator in the Church.”

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INITIATIVES

• In Brief
In Brief

Bogotá, Colombia -- Congress on the Family

Some 750 people attended the Fifth International Congress on the Family entitled “Young People's Lifestyles,” which was held on Saturday, August 28. The event, organized by the Institute for the Family at La Sabana University, offered reflections on the cultural and social factors that influence the lifestyles of adolescents today. Taking part were representatives from government entities, parents, researchers, journalists, teachers and heads of secondary and higher education institutions. Topics discussed included the language of young people; affectivity and sexuality; addictions; new technologies and the formation of youth subcultures.

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Port-au-Prince, Haiti -- A drop of solidarity in an ocean of need

A group of students from North Hall Residence in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago spent the month of July in Haiti to assist in the reconstruction of two schools affected by the tragic earthquake the previous January. Before going the students spent time collecting food and medicines in Trinidad and Tobago: “For several weeks,” one of the university students said, “we visited various supermarkets and asked customers to give us food that we could take to the other island. We were surprised by everyone’s generosity.”

The students worked on the reconstruction of the Saint Rose of Lima and St. Rosalia schools. Some of the buildings resisted the earthquake, but others were reduced to rubble, like most of the buildings in the capital.

The students slept in tents. The day began with Holy Mass and a period of prayer. Then came breakfast and work. “Before leaving,” said one
of the participants, “we were able to paint many rooms that were restored to use. Also, thanks to a professor of Haitian art, we organized a painting workshop with students from the school he works in. We selected the 100 best paintings and brought them back to Trinidad, and exhibited them in an art gallery. The money that we raise from selling them will be sent to the sisters who run the schools in Port-au-Prince.”

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Edea, Cameroon -- Work Camp in the parishes of St. John Bosco and St. Catherine of Siena

This past August, a group of twenty students from the Nolanga Study Center in Yaoundé and the Lobéké Study Center in Duala, two apostolic works of Opus Dei in Cameroon, participated in Project Edea, aimed at the construction of two parish churches in the diocese of Edea.

The students dedicated their mornings to paving the floor of the parish of St. John Bosco and building a drainage system for rainwater around the parish church of St. Catherine of Siena, located some 15 miles from the city of Edea. In the afternoon, they gave catechism classes for over 200 children from these parishes, as well as classes of mathematics, French, English, and Spanish, and finished with some songs and games.

Besides daily Mass and other acts of piety, including the Holy Rosary, there was time to visit the cathedral and the tomb of Babá Simon, the first person born in Cameroon whose process of beatification has been opened. The students also visited orphan children cared for by the Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

They were received by the Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Jean Bosco Ntep, who thanked the students for their help and encouraged them to give consistent witness of Christian life wherever they found themselves. The faithful from the two parishes gave a farewell choral concert for all those taking part in Project Edea.
Tokyo, Japan -- Professional Ethics Conferences

This past November the eighth conference of the Tokyo Leadership Forum was held in the Japanese capital, organized by people in Opus Dei together with friends. Directed to university students and young professionals, this forum aims to contribute to the formation of good professionals and responsible citizens with a solid ethical background. Professor Yuuki Sakurai, a TV commentator on financial affairs and an economic analyst, gave the final session. The conference was held in English and those attending could ask questions in either English or Japanese.

Rome, Italy -- Summer meeting for seminarians

Candidates for the priesthood from various Italian dioceses gathered at the Shrine of Madonna del Divino Amore, from August 22-28, to take part in a work week under the title: “The Communitarian Style of Ministry and Priestly Fraternity.” Some special moments from this Roman experience were the opportunity to attend a General Audience with the Holy Father Benedict XVI, Holy Mass at the Shrine, celebrated by Cardinal Julian Herranz, which was followed by a colloquium with the seminarians, and a Eucharist in the Basilica of St. Peter, celebrated by Archbishop Justo Mullor, president emeritus of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy.
Nairobi, Kenya -- Seventh African Congress on Ethics

Strathmore University held its Seventh African Congress on Ethics. This Congress has become well known in East Africa for its contribution to the struggle against corruption. Seeing the findings of these conferences, the Kenyan Government asked the University to draw up a charter of ethical values for the country that could serve as a basis for future development policies.

More than 300 professionals attended this seventh congress, among whom were politicians, businessmen, educators, and lawyers. Some forty presentations were made by experts from 17 nations. Among the lecturers were Jess Estanislaos (from the Philippines), John Bermel and Sophia Aguirre (United States), Adhiti Gupta (India), Joe Oloka (Uganda), Santiago Martinez (Finland), Patrick Rafolisy (Jerusalem), and Jae Park (Hong Kong). Taking part from Kenya were Catherine Dean, Irene Ngunjiri, Elizabeth Gachenga, Prisca Oluoch, and Jennifer Byarugaba, among others.

The Congress was opened by the Minister of Justice, Mutula Kilonzo, and by the President of the country’s College of Lawyers. The closing act featured Dr. Patrick Lumumba, a prestigious African orator and director of the “Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission.” His address served as a platform to launch a campaign against corruption that was widely echoed in public opinion during the following weeks.

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Nairobi, Kenya -- “Go Getters Leadership Course”

During the past month of January the Faida Girl’s Club started a program designed to help young girls develop their leadership potential. The course, entitled “Go Getters Leadership Course,” ended on July 3rd
with a graduation ceremony in which 38 girls from various schools in Nairobi received diplomas.

The director of the course was Gladys Ogallo, one of the recipients of the “Top Forty Under Forty” prize, a prestigious award that recognizes the achievements of Kenyan women in positions of leadership. The course modules covered the various challenges that young girls who desired to dedicate themselves to the administration and directing of businesses would encounter: “Time Management,” “Goal Setting,” “Problem Solving,” “Decision Making” and “Teamwork.”

Each of the students was involved in a planning project to meet a specific need in their immediate community: in school, in their family, or in the area where they lived. In drawing up this plan, the students put into practice what they had learned in the course.

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Marseille, France -- Inauguration of the Castelvieil Cultural Center

On September 23 the new site of Centre Culturel Castevieil, situated in the heart of Marseille, was inaugurated. Begun in 1963, Castelvieil offers activities of cultural, human and Christian formation. The new site has a spacious auditorium, a section dedicated to activities with high school students, various study rooms, and a large oratory conducive to prayer and recollection. A series of recent conferences has included topics as diverse as the role of parents in education, current questions in astrophysics, and talks on professional ethics.

The inauguration was honored by the presence of Archbishop Georges Pontier of Marseille; the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in France, Msgr. Antoine de Rochebrune; the Senator-Mayor of Marseille, Jean-Claude Gaudin, together with some 200 friends, neighbors, public personalities and journalists.

The President of the Castelvieil Association, Jean Granier, gave the welcome and thanked all those who had contributed financially to the
construction of the new center. He also described the cultural, educational and spiritual activities that the center hoped to provide. Following this, the Regional Vicar spoke about the efforts of the faithful of Opus Dei in Marseille to offer formation and Christian fellowship to many people.

Afterwards, the Archbishop spoke about building up a truly human society in the light of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church. He praised the efforts of the faithful of Opus Dei and their friends in contributing to the solution of current problems in society, harmonizing reason with the light of faith. In that generosity, he said, one could recognize a love for the world inherited from St. Josemaría, which is a “redemptive love,” using an expression of John Paul II. Finally the Senator-Mayor expressed his great appreciation for the cultural and formative work carried out by this center in Marseille.

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Bogotá, Colombia -- Humanism and Literature

On 23 to 25 September, the Department of Languages and Literature at La Sabana University’s Institute of Humanities organized the “Sixth International Colloquium on Hispanic American Literature and its Values” at the Colombian Academy of the Language. Among the sixty persons taking part were writers, philologists, and lecturers from Germany, Costa Rica, France, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Sweden, Uruguay, Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia. This academic event seeks to foster serious research on human values in literature.

Also at the University of La Sabana, a book on the life and work of the first president of the University, Octavio Arizmendi Posada, was published. Entitled An Exemplary Humanist, it is authored by Professor Alfonso Forero Gutierrez. The presentation of the book took place on the anniversary of the birth of Dr. Arizmendi, this past July 29th.
Rome, Italy -- Refresher course in matrimonial law and canonical procedures

From September 20 to 24 the refresher course in matrimonial law and canonical procedure was held for the fourth time at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. Taking part were over 240 people involved in ecclesiastical tribunals from 38 countries. Among those making presentations were Archbishop Raymond Burke (President of the Roman Apostolic Signature), Bishop Antoni Stankiewicz (Dean of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota), and other canonists such as Msgr. Giuseppe Sciacca, Msgr. Carlos Manuel Morán, Msgr. Carlos Jose Errázuriz, Msgr. Paolo Bianchi, Msgr. Joaquin Llobell, Rev. Hector Franceschi, Rev. Massimo del Pozzo, Rev. Nikolaus Schök, Rev. Miguel Ángel Ortiz. Franco Poterzio, doctor in psychiatry, also gave a presentation. A number of round tables were offered in four languages: Italian, English, Spanish, and French.

The course was aimed at presenting to participants jurisprudential developments in the process of declaring the nullity of marriages and some problem that frequently arise in this regard. Many of the speakers highlighted Benedict XVI's address to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, on January 29, 2010, in which the Pontiff said that “both justice and charity demand a love for the truth and necessarily lead to the search for the truth.”


In the months leading up to the beatification of John Henry Newman (held in Birmingham, on September 19), Grandpont House university residence organized a cycle of seminars on the writings of the English cardinal. The sessions were directed to the university population of Oxford who wanted to learn more about Newman’s thought.
The first seminar, entitled “Newman and the Laity,” was held on May 22. Msgr. Richard Stork spoke about Newman’s vision of the role of the laity in the Church and in society. Professor Paul Shrimpton then discussed Newman’s ideas on the formation of the laity. He put special emphasis on the approach taken at the “Catholic University” that Newman founded in 1854, and at the “Oratory School,” also founded by Newman in 1859.

The sessions on Saturday, June 19, centered on “Newman and Humanism.” Rev. James Pereiro spoke about reason and faith in the Cardinal’s thought and the influence of Aristotle’s ethics. Professor Shrimpton looked at Newman’s vision for the university. Following the thought of the new Blessed, he said that the university should be aimed not at imparting a specific body of knowledge, but rather at the development of a balanced and mature human personality.

The last of the seminars, on “Newman and Conscience,” took place on Saturday, July 17. The first speaker, Fr. Peter Bristow, said that one of Newman’s principal contributions to religious thought was the emphasis placed on the role of conscience in Christian life. This is a recurrent theme in his works and letters, especially in his well-known “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk.” The concluding session was given by the spokesman for Newman’s beatification, Jack Valero, who talked about “Newman and Communication.” Valero highlighted the influence of Newman’s writings on the young Joseph Ratzinger, and on the German student Sophie Scholl and other members of the “White Rose” student movement, some of whom lost their life in opposing Nazism.

Rome, Italy -- Informing about the Church in the Pontificate of Benedict XVI

On 6-12 September, thirty journalists participated in the second intensive professional seminar on “The Church Up Close: Covering the Church in the Age of Benedict XVI,” organized by the School of
Institutional Communication at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

The program included sessions in English about questions of special importance today (stem cell research and its moral implications, Pius XII and the Jews, Christian minorities in the world, the beatification of Cardinal Newman, etc.), visits to the Vatican Museums and the Monastery of Subiaco, as well as an invitation to the General Audience of Pope Benedict XVI, who offered participants his “best wishes for their work.” Among those giving talks were Cardinal James Stafford, Jack Valero, spokesman for the beatification of Cardinal Newman, the Vaticanists, Patricia Thomas and John Travis, and Msgr. Charles Sciclunam from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The course also included a visit to the Press Office of the Holy See and a later colloquium with its director, Fr. Federico Lombardi.

The first of these seminars took place in 2008. Its purpose is to give journalists who write about religious questions the professional tools needed to strengthen their informative work on the Catholic Church. In the two seminars held to date, media professionals attending included representatives from The New York Times, The Guardia, The London Times, Il Corriere della Sera, El Pais, Le Monde, BBC, The National Post, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The Record (Australia), etc. The next seminar in this series will take place in September 2012. Information about the program can be found at www.church-communication.net.
IN PACE
Suffrages

In the second half of 2010, 362 faithful of the Prelature and 13 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross passed away.

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

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.

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

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A STUDY
The Hour of a Saint: Time in the Teachings of Josemaría Escrivá by Prof. Alfonso Nieto

The Hours of a Saint
Time in the Teachings of Josemaría Escrivá
Prof. Alfonso Nieto

In the summer of 1951 I read The Way for the first time. I began reading it with some skepticism, perhaps as an unjustified reaction to the praises of a friend who had suggested the book to me. But as I read through its pages, little by little I discovered the human and supernatural wisdom contained there. Among other things, I understood that the temporal and the eternal were not so far apart, and there opened before my eyes a new sense of time. Why? In the following pages I will try to answer that question, showing how the value of time depends on its relation to that which does not change, to the “presence of eternity” in it. In doing so, I will make use of the teachings of St. Josemaría. He was a saint deeply aware of the importance that the good use of time has for those who are seeking human and Christian perfection through their everyday activities.

1. The Sense of Time

Time is born

The story is told that he painted it in one day. Michelangelo Buonarroti clothed the Creator in a red tunic and pictured for us a God who is separating the light from darkness. In the Sistine Chapel we see a depiction of the first day of creation. And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day (Gen 1:3-5). Thus time was born.

What is time? The holy bishop of Hippo said that he did not know the answer, but in the silence of his dialogue with God he had experienced very clearly what yesterday, today, and tomorrow mean. [1] Sixteen centuries later, Pope John Paul II once again asked, “What is time?” And he responded: “both faith and reason point, beyond verifiable and measurable
data, to the perspective of mystery.”[2] Time is mystery reflected in the three great “moments” of the history of salvation: “at the beginning, Creation; the Incarnation-Redemption at the center, and at the end the parousia.”[3]

The usual notion of time refers to the duration of things that are subject to change. The permanence of an entity that does not experience change we call “eternity”; the permanence of an entity that is subject to change we call “time.” Time is the duration proper to a being that changes. Eternity is immutable permanence, not a compilation of many periods of time. God eternally and continually creates time; he gives us the watch and is the watchmaker.

How can we reconcile time and eternity? “This is possible precisely in the light of the revelation of Christ, who united in himself God and man, eternity and time, spirit and matter.”[4] With the redemption, time is a path to discover eternity. This “discovery” brings to mind some words of St. Josemaría. Reminding us that God awaits us in the work of each day, he said to the professors and students at the University of Navarra: “Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”[5] The mystery of time begins to reveal itself in our life when we are eager to discover this “something” that imparts eternity to time, and that makes us understand that “there are no bad or inopportune days. All days are good, for serving God,”[6] without excluding the “difficult” days.[7]

When we “divinizes” time, time joins hands with the timeless; the years advance and recede; a man may be a child and an adult at the same time. St. Josemaría received the grace of divinizing time. At the age of twenty-six he asked God with all his heart for “the maturity of an eighty year old man... so that I would know how to use my time well and learn how to make the best use of every minute, in order to serve him.”[8] While at the age of seventy, he continued striving to be a child before his Father God.

A machine has not been invented that would allow us to go backward or forward in time, among other reasons because the inventor would have to be outside of time.[9] A person who lives the logic of eternity in the
midst of the logic of time makes an offering of one’s intellect, memory, and will, freely placing one’s freedom in God’s hands.

*Time has a master*

Since God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good (Mt 5:45), it is difficult to say that “old times were better, since every age has its good and bad aspects.” The expenditure of time becomes an investment if our eyes are focused on eternity, on the Creator, not on ourselves. Therefore the best return comes when we are totally detached in our use of time, placing God’s will first.

But is it possible to spend time without being its master? A quick answer might be that everyone owns the use of his or her time. The error of this answer is obvious when we consider the reality of life and the reality of death. When we are born and die is set from all eternity.

Then who is the master of time? A friend of mine, an excellent jeweler and a wise businessman, acquired some years ago a shipment of “hour glasses” with sand in them, each timed for a quarter of an hour. Before placing them on sale, someone suggested putting a small inscription on each one in Latin: Dominum tempus habet qui non est tu. “Time has an owner, and it’s not you.” In a few days he sold all the hourglasses at a good price, either because of the Latin, or because they were attractive, or for both reasons. Yes, time does have an owner: “it does not belong to me because it belongs to our Father who is in heaven.”

Under what title do we spend our time? We could say, taking a term from Roman law, that our title is that of “usufructuary” for an indefinite period. So we can never tell its owner: “my years are for me, not for you.” A person who has the right of usufruct of someone else’s property has the obligation to use it in conformity with the rules established by the owner, and thus the right to “use” those years of life although never knowing how many they will be.

From the teachings of St. Josemaría, we could highlight four characteristics of our use of time: it is brief, instantaneous, serene, valuable.

a) *Brief*
Jesus Christ “lived out the unique event of history which does not pass away,” the Paschal mystery. Everything else passes away: “Yesterday has gone, and today is passing by. Tomorrow will soon be another yesterday.” No matter how much anyone tries to eliminate clocks, time continues passing, as the sundial in a corner of Royal Tunbridge Wells in London has proclaimed for centuries: “Ye may waste but cannot stop me.”

The Bible refers often to the brevity of the years of our life, and even quantifies them: the years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore; yet... they are soon gone, and we fly away (Ps 90:10). Job is more succinct: my life is a breath (Job 7:6). St Paul told the first Christians: Brethren, the appointed time has grown very short (1 Cor 7:29).

Our time is brief, short; it passes rapidly, and besides it is... so small. The saint of Siena, to whom St. Josemaría had special devotion, pointed to time’s smallness to show that our fatigues too are small. Time è quanto una punta d’ago e non più --is like the point of a needle, no bigger. And she concluded, “when time has passed, fatigue too has passed.” Perhaps being small helps time function as a sieve of events, which pass through the strainer of the years and thus acquire their true size. Because it is the sum of small amounts of time, each hour escapes in minutes and these seem to fly away in seconds. St. Josemaría sensed throughout his life a “lack of time,” although this scarcity of time had as its background: “when you are in love time flies.”

b) Instantaneous

We could say that God always speaks in real time, because he does so from what is most intangibly real: eternity, where it is always “now.” Therefore the founder of Opus Dei advised us to cultivate “docility to the divine calls of every instant, because God awaits us precisely there.” To postpone this dialogue by saying “tomorrow” or “later” would imply “resistance to grace,” in the face of the now open to “eternal happiness.”

St. Josemaría frequently united two adverbs—“today, now”—in order to emphasize that “time is pressing,” and that “the Lord demands more from us each day.” A consequence of living in the present moment
is knowing how to correct others at the right moment,[26] transmitting the needed counsel on time.[27]

Nevertheless, the “instant” of God does not necessarily coincide with our human “instant.” For example, we can consider the story of the fig tree in the Gospel. Figs usually mature at the beginning of autumn, but the Lord of Time asked the fig tree for fruit outside of that time frame. “It was not the season for figs, but our Lord comes to pick them, knowing full well that he won’t find any at this time of year. However, when the tree proves to be barren in spite of its apparent fertility and luxuriant leaves, Jesus commands, ‘let no man ever eat fruit of yours hereafter.’”[28]

The saints knew how to give fruit in the now that God granted them. St. John of the Cross advised: “Since when the moment comes to give an account you will be grieved not to have used your time in God’s service, why don’t you order and employ your time now as you would have liked to have done when you are dying?”[29]

c) Serene

The family crest of St. Josemaría Escrivá had as its motto two words that refer to the serene use of time: “alma, calma” (energetically, but calmly). The calm use of time leads one to realize that “the works of God are done by God. But human monuments are made and unmade by time.”[30] This is a diligent, not a lazy calm, which enables us to control our impatience and decide at the right time, because life teaches us that what is “urgent” is not always what is “most important.”

Serenity requires balance in the expenditure of time. Referring to time in relation to God, St. Josemaría wrote: “When you go to pray, let this be a firm resolution: Don’t prolong your prayer because you find consolation in it or shorten it because you find it dry.”[31] The serene and positive vision of time is grounded on this reality: with the coming of the Son of God into the world now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation (see 2 Cor 6:2).[32] We live in the best of times: if there were a better time, God would have given it to us.

d) Valuable
How much is time worth? It depends on who is evaluating it, and what it is used for. For example, the price of one second on television commercials broadcast during the Super Bowl in 2010 oscillated between $83,000 and $93,000. These figures are less than those of 2009, when the price of a thirty second commercial reached three million dollars. There are those who consider time as “a dimension of the new capitalism,”[33] but the real value of time—which surpasses the mere “market value”—cannot be put into figures no matter how many digits it contains. To truly understand time requires wisdom, a gift of the Holy Spirit.[34]

For St. Josemaría, time is “our treasure, the “money” with which to buy eternity.”[35] In a homily later published under the title Time is a Treasure, he set forth what seems to me the “magna carta” for the sanctification of time, and which provides the underlying thread for these pages.

*Time and intellect as intangible realities*

An intangible is something that one cannot touch because it lacks a physical substance. The human intellect, the intangible reality par excellence, generates knowledge, which has an economic projection in so-called “intellectual capital,” a computable part of intangible assets. Time and knowledge are interconnected as two complementary intangible realities, whose economic value can be reflected in the rights conferred on the owner of a patent, on a commercial name, trademark, etc.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century intellectual work often entails a greater expenditure of time than work with immediate material results. Nevertheless, in spite of innovations in time measurement, no one has yet succeeded in finding a system of objective measurement of time devoted to intellectual work.

From the perspective of human work, intangible time becomes evident in some stages of the work process; for example, in the search for information, the interchange of ideas or concepts, and in other tasks that are immaterial in nature.[36]

John Paul II said: “The immensity of time! If time is always a movement away from the beginning, it is also, when we think of it, a return to the beginning. And this is of fundamental importance.”[37] It is
certainly important to recognize that time comes from God and returns to God. St. Josemaría wrote: “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel (Mk 1:15).” When you seek to draw close to our Lord, remember that he is always very close to you, that he is in you: regnum Dei intra vos est (Lk 17:21). You will find him in your heart.”[38]

One of the dangers in negotiating business deals is to forget the importance of the long term, and to seek short term benefits in less than a year. This forgetfulness cuts down the horizons of one’s work; it diminishes hope, and makes the heart shortsighted. One needs patience to await the fruit, which will arrive in its time,[39] and the wisdom to discover the greatness hidden in a small beginning. To those who were beginning a university, St. Josemaría once said: “begin small, so the result is a baby eagle, and not a fried chick.”[40]

A long term vision facilitates doing each thing at the right time,[41] without anchoring oneself in the past, or complexes about the present, with the security that all times and places can be brought into accord with “the holiness of the moral doctrine of Jesus Christ.”[42] The long-term view helps one to keep eternity in view, not moving hurriedly, being patient and understanding, “convinced that souls, like good wine, improve with time.”[43]

The union of time and intellect goes back very far indeed. In ancient Greece, the Sphinx on the road to Thebes killed anyone who could not answer the question: What living being walks on four legs in the morning, on two at mid-day, and on three in the evening? Only Oedipus responded correctly: “man.” Time advances inexorably and we cannot prevent it from passing “like water over the pebbly bed of a stream, leaving no trace behind.”[44] But water can also be the greatest enemy of even the most solid rock: “the constant flow of water which drop by drop enters the crevices until it ruins the rock’s structure... the greatest danger for a Christian is to underestimate the importance of fighting skirmishes. The refusal to fight the little battles can, little by little, leave him soft, weak and indifferent, insensitive to the accents of God’s voice.”[45]

A Christian employs his freedom in this struggle and, also “drop by drop,” constructs his own history. St. Josemaría reminded us that “history is
undetermined and open to a variety of human options—all of which God respects.”[46] For “the life and conduct of those who serve God have changed history. Even many of those who do not know our Lord are motivated, perhaps unconsciously, by ideals which derive from Christianity.”[47] His sense of responsibility towards the time that constructs history led him to exclaim: “If only you and I had recognized the day of the Lord! If only men had wanted to give a different outlet to God’s love!”[48] We can change history if we make use of time properly, if we strive to make it bear fruit.

As the Chinese proverb says: “there is a time to go fishing, and a time to dry the nets.” If we don’t know the time for fishing, we can’t know where the fish are. And then it is of little use whether the nets are dry. The expenditure of time is in our hands. A frequently cited passage from Ecclesiastes says: there is a time for everything that is done under the sun. This is followed by fourteen verbs contrasted with fourteen other verbs: a time to be born and a time to die; to plant and to reap; to kill and to heal; to destroy, construct; weep, laugh; lament, dance; throw stones, gather them; embrace, dismiss; try, give up trying; guard, throw away; tear, sew; be quiet, speak; love, hate; wage war, make peace (see Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). Only man combines in time these twenty-eight verbs.

The liturgy of the Church, a gift of the Holy Spirit, year after year, century after century, recalls for us the history of salvation. St. Josemaría lived, and taught others to live, the liturgy with great love. Advent is a time for imploring divine mercy,[49] “a time for hope”[50] which renews the “real longing for Christ to come.”[51] Lent is a time “of penance, purification, and conversion. It is not an easy program, but then Christianity is not an easy way of life. It is not enough just to be in the Church, letting the years roll by.”[52] And there is also a time for joy,[53] which gains special significance in the time of Easter, without being limited to that epoch of the liturgical year, for joy should “always be present in the Christian’s heart.”[54]

Christians have the obligation of administering their time well. Since it is a scarce commodity for most people, its value is increased, especially for those who “do not have time.” “He hasn’t got the time?” asked the author of Furrow. And he answered, “So much the better. Christ is interested
precisely in those who do not have the time.” In the economy of those “without time” minutes are worth hours and seconds are worth minutes.

For anyone who fails to realize the immense value of time, the words of Paul Valéry can be helpful: “Wait until you are hungry. Stop eating and you will see what time is.”

2. In Time

*Always*

If our intellect, memory and will try to do at each moment “what is pleasing to our Lord,” then our use of “always” takes on connotations of eternity, it is above time: your time is always here. The saints are the great promoters of that “always.” The recollections of sanctity are usually accompanied by the word “always”: that person was always cheerful, always generous, always helped as much as he or she could, was always praying, without meaning to praise simply that person’s human capacities. The first apostles who accompanied Jesus, as St. Josemaría said, “were nothing in their time.”

To understand the “always” that rests in God, we need to understand a saint’s constant readiness to serve others. St. Josemaría liked to repeat “serviam! I will serve,” here is the key to the true “always.” Zeal to serve leads one to leave everything for God, without excessive concern for tomorrow—each day’s trouble is sufficient for today (see Mt 6:34)—and without being fearful about death because “it will come in the moment, in the place and in the way that are best.” We need to realize that we are “instruments in the hands of God, instruments that he relies on every day. That is why, every day, we struggle to serve him.”

The day-to-day acquires a universal projection because one “is building the Kingdom of God,” a task entrusted to everyone and from which “no one can feel exempt.” We need to make good use of time: we cannot throw “this treasure irresponsibly overboard. We mustn’t squander this period of the world’s history which God has entrusted to each one of us.”

Our longing to attain “always” surpasses time; it is transformed into the “forever” of eternity. To reach that goal requires much patience,
fortitude, and hope.

a) **Patience**

“God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them.”[67] Chesterton marvelled that God created the daisies one by one, and his admiration increased on seeing the eternal perseverance, patient and constant, of God’s creative action. God “always” wants to help us, as that owner of the vineyard who went to hire workers at the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours of the day (see Mt 20:5-13).

Knowing how to wait for the right time is a way of being patient. St. Josemaría pointed to a unique example in history: “[Our Lord] knew that mankind needed him greatly. He was longing to come into the world to save all souls, but he took his time. He came in due course, just as every other child is born.”[68]

Patience is tested when we think “that Jesus is asleep, that he does not hear us.” This is the moment to “trust the Master completely, place ourselves unreservedly in his hands.”[69] This abandonment can be costly and even require heroism, but in exchange it brings peace and equilibrium to the soul. The patient person lives the motto that adorns a clock in the Vatican Museums: *Oneratem aequilibro*, put equilibrium into what is heavy and troublesome.[70] Then difficulties will be clothed in measure, prudence, and equanimity.

b) **Fortitude**

The search for “always” demands fortitude because it is absolute: we have to seek God “in all times and in all things.”[71] The service of God includes every moment, even a thought that lasts but a second, for “a single thought of man is worth more than the whole world; therefore, only God is worthy of it.”[72]

The fortitude “always” requires is measured by freedom, not just by the clock. To serve in time is not to be a slave of the clock, but to dominate it. Fortitude is necessary so that the clock does not accelerate or slow down time.

c) **Hope**
If “always” looks to eternity, it is filled with the hope that includes all human values, the “hope of Christ.” From this hope-filled position the mind of a wise man will know the time and way. For every matter has its time and way (Eccles 8:5-6). The hope of forever “made St. Teresa of Avila great. One day, as a child, she set out from Avila with her brother Rodrigo through the Adaja gate. As they left behind the city walls, intending to reach the land of the Moors where they could be beheaded for love of Christ, she kept whispering to her brother, who was beginning to get tired, ‘forever, forever, forever.’”

St. Josemaría asked: “What are we looking for all the time in things we do, even without thinking about it especially?” And he answered, “If we are motivated by the love of God, and we work with a right intention, then we are seeking whatever is good and pure, whatever brings peace to our conscience and happiness to our soul.” When we encounter the good and pure we want to give it to others. In the words of a poet, “Let us give time to time: for the glass to overflow we have to fill it first.” To fill time with good is to be at each moment doing what we should, without thinking of selfish concerns, or leaving the future in the hands of others. Time is filled with work and also with rest.

At the end of the decade of the 1950’s, on the photograph of a young donkey with a serene look and alert ears, St. Josemaría wrote: Semper ut iumentum, always like a donkey. He liked to consider the humility of the working donkey, faithful and docile to the indications of its master. The saint described himself as Jesus’ donkey in a text from February 16, 1932, when he heard deep in his soul the words: “Love is deeds and not sweet words and excuses.”

The search for “always” is demanding because God always asks us for more. In the homily The Conversion of the Children of God the founder recalled the words of St. Augustine: “If you say ‘enough,’ you are lost. Go further, keep going. Don’t stay in the same place.”

Using time well

Our use of time never limits the full dominion of the Lord of Time, for he can at any moment ask us for a definitive rendering of accounts. This uncertainty should spur us to make the best possible use of our time in life,
to appreciate the gift of “living time well,” making it render in work and sharing it with those around us.

a) Living time well

Looking at one’s watch frequently is not what “living time” means, although we know that each hour goes by minute by minute. On the contrary, the tension this produces could lead to the “anguish of time,” or to a subtle form of killing it by rushing around, without giving time to time so as to fill it with meaning. A person “lives” an hour well when he or she savors each of the sixty minutes that make it up. Seneca already distinguished between living time and existing in time. The one who “lives” time fills time with deeds, thinking of others for God. St. Josemaría advised: “Use this prescription for your life: ‘I don’t remember my own existence. I don’t think of my own affairs, because I haven’t the time.’ Work and service!”

To live time is to have the possibility of multiplying it, as Joshua did in making one day become as long as two (Sir 46:4, Josh 10:12-14). God lengthens the days of those who live time with joy and, by being faithful, attain a happiness that “will grow greater every day.” The joy of living time is a way of exercising the right to “improve” what one has the usufruct of, converting life into “a continuous prayer, good humor and a peace which never ends.” Thus “our whole day can be a time for prayer—from night to morning and from morning to night.”

The interplay of day and night reminds me of the zoo in Chester, in the United Kingdom. In the “bat house,” in almost complete darkness, the bats fly past the visitors at high speeds. For those flying mammals it is nighttime, even though outside the sun is shining. At the end of their “working day,” the lights are turned on and they go to sleep. The bats “live time” in accord with the electric light. Man has his own key to mark day and night and, when he does so facing God, he lives his time at any hour.

Shortly before the end of the sixteenth century, Francis Bacon wrote: “to choose time is to save time.” Enjoyment of life requires being correct in the choice of time for each activity, beginning with our relationship with God. And since “God is life for us, we should not be surprised to realize that our very existence as Christians must be interwoven with prayer.”
Therefore, to live time is an opportunity to redeem it and make it share in the co-redemption. A passage from St. Paul advises us to walk in wisdom *tempus redimentes,*[91] “redeeming” or making the most of the time. This is a phrase also used in universities to relate time to wisdom: the student’s effort to attain wisdom leads to “redeeming” lost time.[92]

“Every generation of Christians needs to redeem, to sanctify its own time,”[93] while participating in the “turbulent march of human history.”[94] Co-redemptive time puts eternity into the human calendar, and leads to the sublime moment of petition, sacrifice, adoration and thanksgiving: the Holy Mass. Just after his thirtieth birthday, in 1932, St. Josemaría wrote: “Time ought to stand still when Holy Mass is being said.”[95] For the priest is offering eternity in time.

b) *Making time render through work*

“Sanctify your work. Sanctify yourself in your work. Sanctify others through your work.” With these pithy phrases, the Founder of Opus Dei summed up the nucleus of the message that God had entrusted to him in order to remind Christians of it.”[96] The words cited by Bishop Echevarría apply to our time of work, the work that makes time fruitful. Work gives meaning to life, for life means to fill time with physical and intellectual work, and with rest. For the Christian, work, rest, and time are enriched because they have God as their primary goal.

The Creator made man free and did not begrudge him his time;[97] we can order it and spend it in the way we freely chooses. In Christ we find a paradigm of time dedicated to work, for “he earns his bread, for years, with his own work.”[98]

To make time render is to make “the time God allots us” bear fruit.[99] A good worker makes good use of time not only because of the tangible results of his effort: “time is not only money, it is glory, God’s glory!”[100] “It represents a foretaste of the glory that will be granted us hereafter.”[101]

In today’s world, where time is a scarce commodity, we frequently hear complaints about a “lack of time.” Like a good businessman, “we should never have time on our hands, not even a second—and I am not exaggerating. There is work to be done.”[102] A second can have infinite value, that of all eternity.
There are many passages in which he advises making time render\[^{103}\] in all the circumstances of life: in housework,\[^{104}\] in study,\[^{105}\] and he points to the example of the fig tree in the Gospel,\[^{106}\] and the foolish virgins.\[^{107}\]

Every minute has sixty seconds; each hour consumes sixty minutes. But the will to work intensely makes some seconds as valuable as minutes, and the result is that an hour of work surpasses sixty minutes. Time and work increase in productivity when there is intensity in one’s effort.\[^{108}\] But this effort makes rest indispensable to recuperate our strength.\[^{109}\] In the teachings of St. Josemaría about making time render, we find a constant intertwining of a transcendent sense of life and common sense, proper to citizens who live in the ordinary situations of daily life.

c) Sharing time

From the creation of time—by the will of its Creator and Master—the best relationship is to share time with Him and, from that primary relationship, with the persons we interact with during our lifetime. There is no room for sharing time only with oneself and trying to use all of the hours “for me.” In the face of the temptation “to reserve some time for me alone,” we have “to remedy such meanness, by putting things right immediately.”\[^{110}\] Christian solidarity leads us to be generous in the expenditure of time when “the just and rightful needs of others are involved,”\[^{111}\] and to help others who ask us for help.\[^{112}\]

Sharing time requires knowing how to confront the passage of time, when it seems a “succession of apparently similar days.”\[^{113}\] Time will bring with it dryness or setbacks that require us “to ‘go against the grain,’ without any spiritual or human consolation,”\[^{114}\] filling our hours “above all, with love of God.”\[^{115}\]

Restoring time to its owner

It is an obligation of the one who uses something on loan to return to the owner what has been entrusted to him for his use and enjoyment. The proprietor has a right to demand this restitution. But what does it mean to “restore time to its owner”?

This restitution looks, first of all, at the expenditure of time freely
carried out and the alteration—positive or negative—of the time received as a loan. To try to return the same amount of time as that received would mean not realizing who the Owner is, what time is and what the conditions of the loan were. Once more we can recall the parable of the talents and the duty to render a profit from what we have received.\[116\] We can never waste time,\[117\] nor forget its purpose: “You think your time is for yourself? Your time is for God!”\[118\]

A clock helps to control the expenditure of time, and contributes to measuring its productivity. But measuring the hours does not indicate whether they are full or empty, whether they look towards heaven or towards oneself.\[119\]

How are we to restore time to its Owner? I will highlight here three characteristics of this endeavor: it is continuous, non-replaceable, and risky.

a) Continuous

Our obligation to restore time to its Owner is permanent and continuous. Time is restored when it is spent, second by second, by our actions or omissions. St. Josemaría frequently used the word “moment”—a brief portion of time—to reflect the continuous passage of time: “The Lord has the right to be glorified by us ‘at every moment’—it is an obligation for each one of us. So if we waste time we are robbing God of his glory.”\[120\]

How do we measure the “moments” of time? The response goes far beyond clocks and systems of measurement: it is measured by love, which is God’s “tactic.”\[121\] “How great is man when he acknowledges that he is a privileged creature of God and has recourse to Him tota die, at every moment of his journey on earth!”\[122\]

The continuous restoration of time finds an immediate response in the realm of work: “As soon as you offer it up and then set to work, God is already listening and giving encouragement.”\[123\]

b) Non-replaceable

Practically all the products that flood the markets for rapid consumption can be replaced by equal or similar ones. This reality is one of the pillars of free market competition. In the case of time, substitution is
impossible: its use is always personal and non-transferable. One can work for another, but the hours of work continue to be one’s own.

Human clocks—from the sundial to atomic ones—never recover past time or capture future time: they mark the present. But the eternal “master clock,” with the love of God as its ticktock, always provides time to “recover” the past. God’s grace, especially in the sacrament of Penance, permits us to begin again, and recuperate lost hours; also, for example, by a greater dedication and intensity in work.

We can waste time or it can be robbed from us. Already in the fifteenth century before Christ, the water clock was called Clepsidra, Greek for “water stealer.” We rob time from God and from others when we waste it. Each person has specialized thieves of time, but one of the most common is called the imagination. An uncontrolled imagination consumes minutes, hours, and days. This danger is compounded by the new digital means of communication, which can absorb the imagination, leading it to consume days at a time.

c) Risky

The moment of rendering an account for our life is a supremely important one. It is a one-time act of presenting the final balance of the time we have lived, submitting it to the Lord of Time’s judgment. When we can give an account of each “moment” in our life, there shouldn’t be many surprises; but if the contrary is true, one risks losing eternal happiness.

One of the greatest risk factors is the dead time that we have “killed” through selfishness. St. Josemaría was saddened by what is often called killing time. “What a pity to be killing time when time is a treasure from God!” The risk is great; one could say that it is infinite because “when a Christian kills time on this earth, he is putting himself in danger of ‘killing heaven’ for himself.” As he wrote so graphically: “if you kill time, you are opening the doors of your soul to the devil.”

3. Transcending time

St. Josemaría taught that all men and women could “raise their daily duties, their job or profession, to the order of supernatural grace.” Thus
there is born “a new hope that transcends time and the inherent transience of earthly realities.”[133] But this hope requires that we employ both supernatural and human means.[134] Then, as the angel in the Book of Revelation proclaimed: There is no more time (Rev 10:7); it will always be day and there shall be no night there (Rev 21:25).

In the image of eternity

The Book of Wisdom says: for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world (Wis 2:23-24). God created us in the image of and for eternity. But the mystery of sin and the Redemption impede our understanding of eternity, and human routine can erase its deep meaning. As the Founder of Opus Dei wrote: “What a strange capacity man has to forget even the most wonderful things, to become used to mystery!”[135]

At times the word “always” can even weaken mysteries, when one says, for example: “it has always been like that,” “it has always been an unanswered question,” etc., with no implication of eternity. From everlasting to everlasting thou art God (Ps 90:2). As point 999 in The Forge insists: “The only true ‘forever,’ in the complete sense, is the forever of eternity.”[136]

The fact that man has been created in the image of eternity leads him to view his time here on earth as a pilgrimage, for which he has been chosen from all eternity, and hence which is filled with longings for the infinite.

a) A time of pilgrimage

The word “pilgrimage,” as applied to our life here below, means “to understand life as a journey that has to be carried out.”[137] This is how St. Josemaría saw it: “we are pilgrims, wayfarers.”[138] Thus he highlights the eternal value of things that are apparently unimportant,[139] and that our daily occupations “have a meaning which is divine, which belongs to eternity,”[140] a meaning filled with hope.[141]

In our pilgrimage through time, we have to strive to “see things with the eyes of eternity,”[142] in the light of Jesus’ passage on this earth, trying to put ourselves into the Gospels “as just one more person there.”[143]
Then, as our Lord promises us, Blessed are the eyes which see what you see (Lk 10:23). The joys and setback of our daily life are seasoned by “the promise of eternity.”[144]

b) Chosen from all eternity

“I don’t like to speak of someone being singled out to be part of a privileged elect. But it is Christ who speaks, who chooses. It is the language of Holy Scripture: Elegit nos in ipso ante mundi constitutionem, says St. Paul, ut essemus sancti (Eph 1:4), He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy.”[145]

God’s choice is personal; he calls people one by one: “God has you all numbered from eternity.”[146] And his call to be holy is also universal: “our Lord asks all men to come out to meet him, to become saints.”[147] It is a call which reaches each person “at a particular time, but which has been in his mind from all eternity.”[148] It is a call that surprises one at a particular moment in life, as happened with the Virgin Mary who, before the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel, did not know that she had been chosen from all eternity.[149]

God’s choice respects our personal freedom, but once it has been accepted it imbues our life with the desire to “live every moment of our lives with a lively awareness of eternity,”[150] with the security of God’s constant help.[151]

c) Longing for infinity

To use time correctly we need to know the rules of the game. The first is to know that time has a Creator and that he marks the beginning and the end. The second is to recognize that the timelessness called eternity truly exists, and that “the present condition of mankind is not definitive.”[152] Our life entails a spiritual conquest, with “a desire for the Infinite, a desire for eternity.”[153]

The author of The Way wrote many years ago: “Have you seen the dead leaves fall in the sad autumn twilight? Thus souls fall each day into eternity. One day, the falling leaf will be you.”[154]

The Lord of time has reserved the day and the hour for that inevitable meeting; hence the importance of the Gospel’s exhortation “to watch” (see
To “watch” for this final encounter, we need to be vigilant in life, knowing that it is a stage leading to the rendering of accounts for the use we have made of time, paying our Lord back for the redemption he carried out on the Cross, “the price and the treasure of your eternity.”

Directing himself to priests, St. Josemaría reminded them: “the greatest human failure we want to remedy, is sin, separation from God, the danger that souls may be lost for all eternity. Our overriding desire when we celebrate Mass is the same as Christ’s when he offered himself on Calvary: to bring men to eternal glory in the love of God.” The immensity of the offense sin entails is seen by looking at the Cross: “Lord, you died on the Cross to save mankind. And yet for one mortal sin you condemn a man to a hapless eternity of suffering. How much sin must offend you, and how much I ought to hate it!”

The hope of earning eternal happiness requires diligent effort in the face of time that is passing. But the exercise of hope brings peace to the soul. In the homily The Christian’s Hope, St. Josemaría exclaims. “I am happy because I am certain we will attain Heaven if we remain faithful to the end.” But “only those things that bear the imprint of God can display the indelible sign of eternity and have lasting value.”

God offers all men and women the chance of winning eternity; no one is excluded from salvation, unless they freely choose to be. Eternity is a conquest, which we should strive for at every moment. From the Cross Jesus told the repentant sinner: “today you will be with me in paradise.” There we will receive “the eternal embrace of love from God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and from the Blessed Virgin.”

Song of Alphonse the Wise

To speak of eternal happiness without thinking of our Lady, is like speaking of the dawn without the sun. Mary is the Gate and Queen of Heaven, the Mother of Eternity. She “is the masterwork of the Son and the Spirit in the fullness of time.” Our Lady, who is “a full participant in the work of our salvation, follows in the footsteps of her Son: the poverty of Bethlehem, the everyday work of a hidden life in Nazareth, the manifestation of his divinity in Cana of Galilee, the tortures of his passion, the divine sacrifice on the cross, the eternal blessedness of paradise.”
There are many passages in the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei that praise the glories of Mary. Among the earliest is Holy Rosary, a book written in 1931, when the author was only 29. There he advises his readers to reach Jesus through a “confident love for Mary.” The angels themselves marvel at Mary “taken body and soul to Heaven,” where “the most Blessed Trinity receives and showers honors on the Daughter, Mother, and Spouse of God”

The centuries have produced many signs of the devotion of Christians to their Mother: poems, paintings, sculptures, songs…. As St. Josemaría recalled. “I remember a lovely poem, one of the songs collected by Alfonso X the Wise. It’s a legend about a simple monk who begged our Lady to let him see heaven, even if only for a moment. Our Lady granted him his wish and the good monk found himself in paradise. When he returned, he could not recognize the monastery—his prayer, which he had thought very short, lasted three centuries.”

This song is number 103 in the Songs to the Virgin Mary. The refrain of the poem, repeated fourteen times, reminds all Christians that whoever serves our Lady faithfully, will reach Paradise. As the old Spanish reads: Quen Virgen ben servirá / a Parayso irá.

[5] Passionately Loving the World, a homily given at the University of Navarra on October 8, 1967 in Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá, 114 (hereafter referred to as Conversations).


[22] *Christ Is Passing By*, 152.

[23] For example, in *The Forge*, no. 163.


[26] See *The Forge*, no. 596.

[27] See *Friends of God*, 158.

[28] Idem, 51.

[29] The italics are mine. San Juan de la Cruz, *Obras Completas. Dichos*


[31] St. Josemaría, The Way, no. 99 (hereafter this will be cited by the name of the book).


[34] The mind of a wise man will know the time (Eccles 8:5).


[41] See Furrow, no. 950.


[43] Friends of God, no. 78.


[47] Idem, 150.

See *Christ Is Passing By*, 7.


[52] *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 57.


[57] *Christ Is Passing By*, 58.


[59] St. Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 12 (Hereafter it will be cited by the name of the book.)

[60] *Christ Is Passing By*, 179.


[64] See *Christ Is Passing By*, 158.


[66] See *The Forge*, 999.


[70] Planisferologio Faresiano. Gift of the Count of Caseta to Leo XIII. Vatican Museums.


[73] Furrow, no. 293.


[75] Idem, 292. The italics are mine.

[76] Antonio Machado: Proverbios y Cantares, LI.

[77] See Conversations, 88.

[78] See Furrow, no. 55.


[81] The text is as follows: “February 16, 1932: For the last several days I have had a rather bad cold, and it has been an occasion for my lack of generosity towards my God to show itself. I slacked off in the thousand little things that a child—especially a child donkey—can offer his Lord each day. I started noticing this, and that I was postponing the fulfillment of certain resolutions about putting more time and effort into devotional practices, but I calmed myself with the thought, ‘Later, when you’re well, when your family’s financial situation is in better shape... then!’ Well, today, after giving the nuns Holy Communion... I told Jesus what I tell him so many, many times both day and night:... ‘I love you more than these.’ And immediately I understood, without hearing any words: ‘Love is deeds, not sweet words and excuses.’ At that moment I saw clearly how little generosity I have. Suddenly there came to my memory many details, which I hadn’t been paying attention to, which made me see with crystal clarity my lack of generosity. O Jesus, help me, so that your donkey will be fully generous. Deeds, deeds!”

[82] Christ Is Passing By, 58. The citation from St. Augustine is from
St. John records our Lord’s words: *Are there not twelve hours in the day?* (Jn 11:9).

“Nothing should lead you to think that a person has lived for a long time because you see gray hair and wrinkles. That person has not lived a long time, but has existed for a long time.” Lucius Aeneus Seneca, *De brevitate vitae*, in *Invitación a la serenidad*, Ediciones Temas de hoy, Madrid 1998, 20.

And he adds: “In fact, as holy Scripture reminds us, even our sleep should be a prayer” *Christ Is Passing By*, 119. My soul yearns for thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee (Is 26:9).


*In sapientia ad eos quie foris sunt: tempus redimentes* (Col 4:5).

Two time pieces on university campuses that bear the inscription *In sapientia ambulate tempus redimentes* are the sundial in the Fellow’s Garden, Trinity College, Cambridge, England, and the clock in the Memorial Union, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

*In sapientia ad eos quie foris sunt: tempus redimentes* (Col 4:5).

Homily of Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, at the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría, celebrated in St. Peter’s Square in Rome on October 7, 2002.

See The Forge, 539.

Christ Is Passing By, 61.

Idem, 37.

Friends of God, no. 81.

Idem, 212.

Idem, 42.

For example, in The Way, Furrow, and The Forge there are, in total, 42 points on the good use of time.

See Conversations, 89.

See Furrow, no. 523.

See The Way, no. 354.

See Friends of God, 40.

See The Way, nos. 333, 335; Friends of God, 186.

See Friends of God, 137.

Furrow, no. 19.

Friends of God, 138.

St. Josemaría urged: “We have to make good use of our time here on earth! Help me to take advantage of it!” Vázquez de Prada, The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. III, The Divine Ways on Earth, op. cit., p. 501.

Christ Is Passing By, 9 and 24.

Furrow, no. 149.

The response of the master to the “wicked and slothful servant” is still valid: you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest (Mt 25:27).


[118] Idem, 49.

[119] In regard to clocks and the use of time, I cannot resist transcribing a passage from St. Teresa of Avila: “Father Antonio had already gathered some of the things necessary. Insofar as we could, we helped him; although our help amounted to little. He came to Valladolid with great happiness to speak to me and told me what he had collected, which was very little. It was only with clocks that he was well provided, for he had five of them; this greatly amused me. He told me they were meant as a help to follow the daily schedule, which he wanted well fixed; I don’t think he even had any bed yet to sleep on” The Foundations, ch. 14, 1; in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, edited by the Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1985, p. 164.

[120] Furrow, no. 508; see also no. 509.

[121] Idem, no. 147.


[123] Idem, 67


[125] “Blessed be God’ you said to yourself after having finished your sacramental Confession. And you thought: it is as if I had just been born again. You then continued calmly: ‘Domine, quid me vis facere? — Lord, what would you have me do?’ And you yourself came up with the reply: ‘By the help of your grace I will let nothing and no one come between me and the fulfillment of your most Holy Will: Serviam — I will serve you unconditionally’” The Forge, 238.

[126] See Furrow, nos. 167 and 996.


[129] See The Forge, no. 1050.

[130] Idem, no. 706.

[131] Friends of God, 46.

[132] Furrow, no. 620.pdf


[134] On the first day of 1972, the Founder of Opus Dei read to those who were around him the text of a note that he had written the previous afternoon, as a resolution for the coming year: “This is our destiny on earth: to struggle, for love until the last moment. Deo gratias!” Vázquez de Prada, The Founder of Opus Dei. Vol. III: The Divine Ways on Earth,” p. 452.


[136] The Forge, no. 999.

[137] The official Spanish dictionary (of the Royal Academy) indicates as a third meaning of the expression pilgrimage that: “in certain religions, life is understood as a road which one has to journey along in order to reach a future life of union with God after death.”

[138] Christ Is Passing By, 177.

[139] See Conversations, 112.


[144] Friends of God, 68.

[145] Christ Is Passing By, 1.


[147] Christ Is Passing By, 33.
And the text continues: “That’s how I explain Christ waiting in the Eucharist. It is God waiting for us, God who loves man” Christ Is Passing By, 151.

Tradition sees the protagonist as the monk Virila (ninth century), at the Monastery of San Salvador de Leyre, Navarra. See Kevin R. Poole: In Seach of Paradise: Time and Eternity in Alfonso X’s Cantiga 103, eHumanista: Volume 9, 2007, pp. 110 and ff.