

PRAYING WITH THE CHURCH 2008

Special edition to PRAYER AND SERVICE

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N. 3

PRESENTATION

The Holy Father Benedict XVI invites us to unite our apostolic prayer to that of the Heart of Jesus who offers himself to the Father for all humanity. The Pope explicitly repeated this invitation in three of his documents: in his Encyclical "Deus caritas est", in his letter for the fiftieth anniversary of "Haurietis aquas" and in his Lenten message for the year 2007.

"He comes to meet us, he endeavours to attract us, drawing us to the Last Supper, to the pierced heart on the cross, to the apparitions of the Risen One and to the great works through which he, through the action of the Apostles, guided the path of the nascent Church. Nor has the Lord been absent in the successive history of the Church: he always comes to meet us through the men in whom he reveals himself; through his Word, in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. In the liturgy of the Church, in her prayer, in the living community of the faithful, we experience God's love, we perceive his presence and thus learn how to recognize him in our daily life too. He loved us in the first place and continues to be the first to love us; this is why we too are able to respond with love" (DCE, 17).

On May 15th 2006, in his letter on the fiftieth anniversary of the Encyclical *Haurietis aquas* he said: "The cult of love which becomes visible in the mystery of the cross and is continued in every eucharistic celebration constitutes the basis for our becoming people capable of loving and surrendering ourselves (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, 69), as instruments in Christ's hands: only thus can we be credible heralds of his love. However, this availability to God's will must be constantly renewed: "Love is never "concluded" and completed (cf. Enc. *Deus caritas est*, 17)".

The invitation is repeated in the Holy Father's message for Lent 2007: "*And they will look upon the one whom they have pierced*" (Jn 19:37).

"Lent is a favourable time for learning to stay with Mary and John, the beloved disciple, by the side of him who consummated the sacrifice of his life for all humanity on the cross (cf. Jn 19:25). At this time of penance and prayer let us therefore attentively direct our gaze towards the crucified Christ who, dying on Calvary, fully revealed God's love".

And a little further on: "Jesus said: "And when I am lifted up from earth, I shall draw all human beings to myself" (Jn 12:32). The answer the Lord ardently desires from us is that we first of all accept his love and allow ourselves to be attracted by it. However, accepting his love is not enough. We must respond to this love and commit ourselves to communicating it to others: Christ "draws me to himself" to be united with me, so that I may learn to love my brothers with his same love".

Blood and water

"*They shall look on him whom they have pierced*". Let us look with trust at the pierced side of Jesus from which flow "blood and water" (Jn 19:34)! The Fathers of the Church considered these elements as symbols of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Through the water of Baptism, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, we are given access to the intimacy of Trinitarian love. In the Lenten journey, memorial of our Baptism, we are exhorted to come out of ourselves in order to open ourselves in trustful abandonment to the merciful embrace of the Father (cf. Saint John Chrysostom, *Catecheses*, 3,14ff.). Blood, symbol of the love of the Good Shepherd, flows into us especially in the Eucharistic mystery: "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation... we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving" (Encyclical *Deus caritas*

est, n. 13). Let us live Lent, then, as a "Eucharistic" time in which, welcoming the love of Jesus, we learn to spread it around us with every word and deed. Contemplating "him whom they have pierced" moves us in this way to open our hearts to others, recognizing the wounds inflicted upon the dignity of the human person; it moves us in particular to fight every form of contempt for life and human exploitation and to alleviate the tragedies of loneliness and abandonment of so many people. May Lent be for every Christian a renewed experience of God's love given to us in Christ, a love that each day we, in turn, must "re-give" to our neighbour, especially to the one who suffers most and is in need. Only in this way will we be able to participate fully in the joy of Easter" (Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2007).

The Christ of the intentions

In Chapter 25 of Saint Matthew's Gospel Christ presents us with the image of the last judgment, when we will all be subjected to the last examination of love. Here Christ presents us with his tremendously realistic and actual self-portrait: a faithful reflection of the "here and now" of humanity: the hunger, thirst, nakedness, imprisonment, sickness and suffering of the men and women of all times are united to portray Christ's face in the midst of us. Thus Christ shows himself to each one of us and questions us concerning love.

We can also say that every year his Holiness the Pope, through the Intentions of his ministry of universal Pastor, presents us with as many faces of Christ as those he contemplates daily in his apostolic work as Peter's successor. For us these faces are a prelude and preparation for the great final examination of love.

In 2008 we will look at the face of a Christ who is shattered because of the division of Christians (January), emarginated in the

mentally sick (February), the victim of hatred among persons and peoples (March), forced to leave his home and country (September), a martyr to the culture of violence and death (December).

Christ also asks us for help for those in need of hope and peace (April), for those who seek a culture which defends and promotes the values of the human person (May), for those who want to meet someone who will lead them to Christ (June), for those who need someone who is ready to offer a concrete service (July), for those who need light to discover the Lord who is present in the wonders of creation (August).

Finally, it is Christ the Lord who shows us the way, through God's Word lived in the community of the Church (October), and who offers us his help to live like him who came to serve and not to be served (November).

Apostolic Prayer

The commentaries which follow the statement of each Intention are texts by the Holy Father Benedict XVI which help us cull and penetrate their apostolic dimension. Christ's face which asks us to recognize him is not the face of a single individual or even of a small group of persons: it is the face of the humanity living on earth today which asks for our prayers and apostolic service. This is why our petitions are in the plural - "for us" -, as they are in the apostolic prayer par excellence, the "Our Father". We include ourselves in our petition since we are a part of humanity and declare our solidarity with the human family.

When we assume the problems of humanity in apostolic prayer this implies actively constructing the Kingdom of God with all Christ's faithful disciples. It also means asking, all together, that the Father's will, which is a plan of universal love, unity and harmony, will be carried out.

Missionary dimension

Where the apostolic dimension is concerned, the Missionary intentions particularly stress the aspect of the mission of evangelizing and announcing the Word of God.

Missionary prayer cries out to God since its ultimate aim is always and explicitly the announcement of the gospel. In Chapter 4 of the Acts of the Apostles (vv. 23-31), the first Christian community of Jerusalem gathered in prayer recognized God's work throughout history and then stated its own suffering and persecutions, but the conclusion of its prayer was not the well-being of the Church or freedom from persecution but: "grant us that we may worthily announce your word".

The contents of the Missionary Intentions highlight one or another aspect of this evangelizing mission which the Church feels she has received from her very birth and our Holy Father Benedict XVI indicates some of those he considers the most important at the present moment of the Church and the world.

Liturgical dimension

Every month we have the "Liturgy-Celebration" section with suggestions for giving a liturgical dimension to the monthly intentions.

The liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church tends and at the same time the source from which it draws its strength (SC 10). Obviously, our Holy Father the Pope's Intentions for his apostolic ministry are accompanied by suggestions for liturgical activity so that, together with Christ in the eucharistic celebration, we may present the Father with all the spiritual, ministerial and apostolic activities the faithful may have lived and developed each month in keeping with the theme of each intention.

In the Eucharist it will be Christ himself, in his different forms of presence, who will unite his faithful around the theme of the prayer proposed by his Vicar on earth, enlightening them and making them participants in his operative charity.

With this aim in view, a Mass proposed by the Roman Missal in tune with this theme is suggested. The texts of the liturgy of the Word will be of use for personal or group prayer and for preparing the homily, which can also be enriched with the help of the commentary on each intention.

The local Churches also have a vast repertory of liturgical songs which can be used following the theme of the Eucharist or the celebration of the Word.

An examination of our faith

The liturgical texts are followed by a series of questions on the theme of the Intention. These questions, asked in a group or in the form of individual self-examination, may be taken as a stimulus to revive our own faith. The expression "prayer of faith" (*oratio fidei*), appears in the Letter of the Apostle Saint James (5:15), in the statement that "the prayer of faith will save the sick person". Saint James says that the prayer of a sincere person who has great faith is extremely helpful. We can extend our prayer of faith not only to circumstances of bodily sickness but to every need of humanity expressed in the Intentions.

The questions indicated for each month will help each person examine himself concerning the state of his faith and the sincerity with which he raises his prayer to God for his brothers. Often, as Saint James' Letter states, the best indication of the authenticity of our faith will be our works and the spirit of service which must accompany prayer. When it is a matter of obtaining God's favour, the questions asked for an examination of faith have

their theological and evangelical roots in Jesus' own examination of the faith of the sick who asked him to heal them: "Do you believe I can heal you? Do you have faith?"

School of prayer

Finally, every Intention must be accompanied by helpful indications for personal and community prayer.

Christ recommended personal prayer in the gospel: "When you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut the door, pray" (Mt 6:6). Jesus himself practised this kind of prayer, frequently retiring to pray in solitude.

Personal prayer is not flight from the world or from reality. On the contrary, it transforms and purifies the individual conscience so that it can perceive the surrounding reality more clearly in order to transform it and bring about the Kingdom of God.

Every year, in unison with the Vicar of Christ, the Church prays for the needs of humanity. Thus, in different ways and on different levels, we bring the words of Vatican Council II on prayer in the Church closer to reality through the papal Intentions: *It is truly the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father* (SC, 84).

Praying with the Church

Let us conclude with Pope Benedict XVI's words which invite us in his Letter on the Encyclical *Haurietis aquas* to gaze on the pierced side of Christ so that our hearts may be modeled on Christ's Heart.

"Our gaze directed towards the Lord who "took our sicknesses away and carried our diseases for us" (Mt 8:17) helps us turn our attention to the sufferings and needs of others. The contemplation, in adoration, of the side pierced by the lance makes us sensitive to God's salvific will. It enables us to abandon ourselves to his salvific and merciful love and at the same time strengthens our desire to participate in his work of salvation, transforming us into his instruments.

The gifts received from the open side, from which "blood and water" flowed (cf. Jn 19:34) transform our lives, for others too, into a source from which flow "streams of living water" (Jn 7:38) (cf. DCE, 7). The experience of love lived through the cult of the Redeemer's pierced side protects us from the danger of closing in on ourselves and makes us more available for a life devoted to others. "This has taught us love – that he gave up his life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our life for our brothers" (1Jn 3:16) (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, 38)". (Benedict XVI, Letter on the 50th anniversary of Pius XII's Encyclical *Haurietis aquas*, May 15th 2006).

JANUARY

JANUARY

That the Church may strengthen her commitment to full visible unity in order to manifest in an ever growing degree her nature as community of love, in which is reflected the communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Dear Brother in Christ,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet Your Beatitude in this very place where Patriarch Shnork Kalustian welcomed my predecessors Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II. With great affection I greet the entire Armenian Apostolic community over which you preside as shepherd and spiritual father. My fraternal greeting goes also to his Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and *Catholicos* of all Armenians, and the hierarchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church. I give thanks to God for the Christian faith and witness of the Armenian people, transmitted from one generation to the next, often in very tragic circumstances such as those experienced in the last century.

Our meeting is more than a simple gesture of ecumenical courtesy and friendship. It is a sign of our shared hope in God's promises and our desire to see fulfilled the prayer that Jesus offered for his disciples on the eve of his suffering and death: "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21). Jesus gave his life on the Cross to gather into one the dispersed children of God, to break down the walls of division. Through the sacrament of Baptism, we have been incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church. The tragic divisions which, over time, have arisen among Christ's followers openly contradict the Lord's will, give scandal to the world and damage that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, 1). Precisely by the witness of their faith and love, Christians are called to offer a radiant sign of hope and consolation to this world, so marked by conflicts and tensions. We must

continue therefore to do everything possible to heal the wounds of separation and to hasten the work of rebuilding Christian unity. May we be guided in this urgent task by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit.

In this respect I can only offer heartfelt thanks to the Lord for the deeper fraternal relationship that has developed between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Catholic Church. In the thirteenth century, Nerses of Lambron, one of the great Doctors of the Armenian Church, wrote these words of encouragement: "Now, since we all need peace with God, let its foundation be harmony among the brethren. We have prayed to God for peace and continue to do so. Look, he is now giving it to us as a gift: let us welcome it! We asked the Lord to make his holy Church solid, and he has willingly heard our plea. Let us climb therefore the mountain of the Gospel faith!" (*Synodal Discourse*). These words of Nerses have lost nothing of their power. Together let us continue to pray for the unity of all Christians, so that, by receiving this gift from above with open hearts, we may be ever more convincing witnesses of the truth of the Gospel and better servants of the Church's mission.

Benedict XVI

*Visit to the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate and
Meeting with his Beatitude Patriarch Mesrob II, 30 November 2006
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LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass: The Church on the road towards unity (RM Eucharistic Prayer V/d).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: I shall take you from among the nations and I shall give you a new heart: Ezk 36:24-28.

Responsorial Psalm: The Lord is my shepherd: Ps 23 (22).

Second reading: Let there be no divisions among you: 1Co 1:10-13.

Gospel: Only one flock and only one shepherd: Jn 10:11-16.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What can be done for the world to discover that the Church is a community of love?
2. How can your fellow citizens recognize that your Christian community is a community of love?
3. Why do you think that this intention speaks of the union of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

PRAYER - MEDITATION *The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love*

19. "If you see charity, you see the Trinity", wrote Saint Augustine. In the foregoing reflections, we have been able to focus our attention on the Pierced one (cf. Jn 19:37, Zc 12:10), recognizing the plan of the Father who, moved by love (cf. Jn 3:16), sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem man. By dying on the Cross - as Saint John tells us - Jesus "gave up his Spirit" (Jn 19:30), anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit that he would make after his Resurrection (cf. Jn 20:22). This was to fulfil the promise of "rivers of living water" that would flow out of the hearts of believers, through the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Jn 7:38-39). The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. Jn 13:1-13) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. Jn 13:1, 15:13).

The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his

evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this *service of charity*, on which I want to focus in the second part of the Encyclical.

Benedict XVI

Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est", 25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That the Church in Africa, which is preparing to celebrate her second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, may continue to be the sign and instrument of reconciliation and justice in a continent which is still marked by war, exploitation and poverty.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I greet you with joy during your pilgrimage to the places where the Apostles Peter and Paul witnessed to Christ the Saviour to the point of martyrdom. I warmly hope that your Meetings with the Pope and his collaborators, an expression of the communion of your local Churches with the See of Peter, will increase your apostolic dynamism at the service of the People of God entrusted to your care.

I thank you for everything you have told me at our Meetings. Please assure the members of your Dioceses of my spiritual closeness to them at this time when, together with all the inhabitants of the Country, they are asked to work for peace and reconciliation in the period subsequent to the war years which took a toll of millions, particularly in your region. May they be courageous champions of the dignity of every human being and daring witnesses of Christ's charity in order to build an increasingly just and fraternal society!

The commitment to peace is a challenge to the Bishop's evangelizing mission. Your quinquennial reports describe the difficult conditions in which you exercise your ministry. Past conflicts and continuing areas of insecurity are leaving deep wounds in the population, giving rise to weariness and despair.

During this year which your local Church has dedicated to Bl. Anwarite Nengapeta, I hope that the imperative of charity will spur you to become prophets of justice and peace yourselves, through the holiness of your lives and the missionary zeal that enlivens you.

Indeed, "for the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" (Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, n. 25). I am delighted with the pastoral ministry that the priests, consecrated persons and various charitable agencies carry out locally in the *living Ecclesial Communities*, to share in the concern for charity in the service of the least, making themselves credible witnesses of the love Christ bears them. Work for the unity of the People of God and do your utmost to create a people of brothers and sisters, assembled by Christ and sent out by him!

It is important that you pursue the demanding task of implanting the Gospel in your culture. You should respect the wealth of authentic African values but also purify them of all that might make them incompatible with the Gospel truth.

Furthermore, it is desirable that you promote the Sacrament of Penance, through which God sets man free from sin, enabling him to be increasingly a leaven of reconciliation and peace in the Church and in society.

Priests and the faithful alike are called to rediscover the Eucharist as the centre of their existence, acquiring at that *great school of peace* a deep sense of their commitments and a powerful appeal to become promoters of dialogue and communion (cf. *Mane nobiscum Domine*, n. 27).

(...)

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of our Meeting, how can I omit to tell you once again of the well-grounded hope I share with you of seeing reconciliation and peace triumph in your Country and throughout the Great Lakes Region! May all those who preside over the future of the Nation join forces to act responsibly in order to achieve a lasting peace!

I also appeal to the International Community not to forget Africa, especially by pursuing courageous and determined action to consolidate your Country's political and economic stability.

Lastly, I urge your communities to undertake "an extensive process of education and witness aimed at making everyone more aware of the need for a fuller appreciation of the truth of peace" (*Message for World Day of Peace 2006*, n. 16, 8 December 2005).

On returning to your Dioceses, take back to all your priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and lay faithful the affection of the Successor of Peter, who calls them to live the service of charity in their daily lives while being more and more united in Christ, and who imparts to them as well as to you a special Apostolic Blessing.

Benedict XVI
Address to the Bishops
from the Democratic Republic of the Congo
on their "Ad Limina" visit, 6 February 2006

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FEBRUARY

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That the mentally handicapped may not be marginalized, but respected and lovingly helped to live in a way worthy of their physical and social condition.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

(...)

The next World Day of the Sick will be celebrated in Adelaide, Australia, and the events will culminate with a Eucharistic Celebration in the Cathedral dedicated to Saint Francis Xavier, an unflagging missionary to the peoples of the Orient. On this occasion, the Church intends to bow down over those who suffer with special concern, calling the attention of public opinion to the problems connected with mental disturbance that now afflicts one-fifth of humanity and is a real social-health care emergency.

Recalling the attention that my venerable Predecessor John Paul II devoted to this annual event, I too, dear brothers and sisters, would like to be spiritually present on the World Day of the Sick, to pause in order to reflect, in harmony with those taking part, on the situation of the mentally ill in the world and to call for the commitment of Ecclesial Communities to bear witness to the tender mercy of God towards them.

In many countries, legislation in this field does not yet exist and in others, there is no definite mental-health policy. It should then be noted that prolonged armed conflicts in various regions of the world, the succession of terrible natural catastrophes and the spread of terrorism, in addition to causing a shocking number of deaths, have triggered psychological traumas that are sometimes difficult to cure in many survivors.

In the economically highly-developed countries, experts then recognize that at the origin of new forms of mental disease we may also find the negative impact of the crisis of moral values. This

increases the feeling of loneliness, undermining and even breaking up traditional forms of social cohesion, starting with the family institution, and marginalizing the sick, particularly the mentally ill who are all too often considered as a burden on the family and community.

Here I would like to praise those who in different ways and capacities work so that the spirit of solidarity is not lacking and that people persevere in taking care of these brothers and sisters of ours, finding inspiration in human and Gospel-based ideals and principles. I therefore encourage the efforts of those who strive to ensure that all mentally ill people are given access to necessary forms of care and treatment. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, services for these sick people are lacking, inadequate or in a state of decay.

The social context does not always accept the mentally ill with their limitations, and this is another reason difficulties are encountered in securing the human and financial resources that are needed. One perceives the need to better integrate the two approaches: appropriate therapy and new sensitivity towards disturbance, so as to enable workers in the sector to deal more effectively with these sick people and their families, who would be unable on their own to care adequately for their relatives in difficulty. The next World Day of the Sick is a suitable occasion to express solidarity to families who have mentally ill persons dependent upon them.

I would now like to address you, dear brothers and sisters, tried by illness, to invite you to offer your condition of suffering, together with Christ, to the Father, certain that every trial accepted with resignation is meritorious and draws divine goodness upon the whole of humanity.

I express appreciation to those who help and care for you in residential centres, day hospitals and wards providing diagnosis and

treatment, and I exhort them to strive to ensure that medical, social and pastoral assistance for those in need is never lacking, respectful of the dignity proper to every human being. The Church, particularly through the work of her chaplains, will not fail to offer you her help, well aware that she is called to express Christ's love and concern for those who suffer and for those who look after them.

I commend pastoral workers and voluntary associations and organizations to support in practical ways and through concrete initiatives, those families who have mentally ill people dependent upon them. I hope that the culture of acceptance and sharing will grow and spread to them, thanks also to suitable laws and health-care programmes which provide sufficient resources for their practical application.

The training and updating of personnel who work in such a delicate sector of society is more urgent than ever. Every Christian, according to his specific duty and responsibility, is called to make his contribution so that the dignity of these brothers and sisters may be recognized, respected and promoted.

Duc in altum! This invitation of Christ to Peter and the Apostles I address to the Ecclesial Communities spread throughout the world and in a special way to those who are at the service of the sick, so that, with the help of Mary, *Salus infirmorum*, they will witness to God's goodness and fatherly concern. May the Holy Virgin comfort those who are afflicted by illness and support those who, like the Good Samaritan, soothe their physical and spiritual wounds. I assure each of you that you will be remembered in my prayer, as I willingly impart my Blessing upon you all.

Benedict XVI
Message for the 14th World Day of the Sick, 8 December 2005

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for the sick (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: The Lord burdened himself with our sufferings: Is 53:2-4, 10-11.

Responsorial Psalm: Lord, hear my prayer, let my cry for help reach you: Ps 102 (101).

Second reading: My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness: 2Co 12:7-10.

Gospel: They will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover: Mk 16:15-20.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Why are the mentally handicapped easily marginalized?
2. Through what gestures and what words can we express our respect for them?
3. How can we show them that they are loved?

PRAYER - MEDITATION *"Him whom they have pierced"*

Dear brothers and sisters, let us look at Christ pierced on the Cross! He is the unsurpassing revelation of God's love, a love in which *eros* and *agape*, far from being opposed, enlighten each other. On the Cross, it is God himself who begs the love of his creature: He is thirsty for the love of every one of us. The Apostle Thomas recognized Jesus as "Lord and God" when he put his hand into the wound of his side. Not surprisingly, many of the saints found in the Heart of Jesus the deepest expression of this mystery of love. One could rightly say that the revelation of God's *eros* toward man is, in

reality, the supreme expression of his *agape*. In all truth, only the love that unites the free gift of oneself with the impassioned desire for reciprocity instils a joy which eases the heaviest of burdens. Jesus said: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). The response the Lord ardently desires of us is above all that we welcome his love and allow ourselves to be drawn to him. Accepting his love, however, is not enough. We need to respond to such love and devote ourselves to communicating it to others. Christ "draws me to himself" in order to unite himself to me, so that I learn to love the brothers with his own love.

Blood and water

"They shall look on him whom they have pierced". Let us look with trust at the pierced side of Jesus from which flow "blood and water" (Jn 19:34)! The Fathers of the Church considered these elements as symbols of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Through the water of Baptism, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, we are given access to the intimacy of Trinitarian love. In the Lenten journey, memorial of our Baptism, we are exhorted to come out of ourselves in order to open ourselves in trustful abandonment to the merciful embrace of the Father (cf. Saint John Chrysostom, *Catecheses*, 3,14ff.). Blood, symbol of the love of the Good Shepherd, flows into us especially in the Eucharistic mystery: "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation... we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving" (Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, n. 13). Let us live Lent, then, as a "Eucharistic" time in which, welcoming the love of Jesus, we learn to spread it around us with every word and deed. Contemplating "him whom they have pierced" moves us in this way to open our hearts to others, recognizing the wounds inflicted upon the dignity of the human person; it moves us in particular to fight every form of contempt for life and human exploitation and to alleviate the tragedies of loneliness and abandonment of so many people. May Lent be for every Christian a renewed experience of God's love given to us in Christ, a love that each day we, in turn, must "re-give" to our neighbour, especially to

the one who suffers most and is in need. Only in this way will we be able to participate fully in the joy of Easter. May Mary, Mother of Beautiful Love, guide us in this Lenten journey, a journey of authentic conversion to the love of Christ. I wish you, dear brothers and sisters, a fruitful Lenten journey, imparting with affection to all of you a special Apostolic Blessing.

Benedict XVI

Message for Lent 2007, 21 November 2006

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MISSION INTENTION

That the Institutes of Consecrated Life, which are so flourishing in mission countries, may rediscover the missionary dimension and, faithful to the radical choice of evangelical counsels, be generous in bearing witness to and announcing Christ to the ends of the earth.

Bearing witness to the strength of Christ's charity

The third appeal – or challenge – faced today is that of being "sign of the Lord's Pasch in the midst of men" through charity. The commitment to transform social reality with the strength of the Gospel has always been a challenge and continues to be one today, at the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era. It is not always easy to welcome Jesus Christ's announcement, the "Good News" of salvation, of love, of justice and peace, in the present-day world. However, today, man needs more than ever the Gospel, the faith which saves, the hope which illuminates, the charity one gives.

History faces us today with many new phenomena which nourish both the hopes of a fuller life and the fear of suffering and death; phenomena which speak of progress and freedom, seeking to hide the profound signs of the new slaveries and the struggles between men, peoples and nations. In this "habitat" those who are consecrated run the risk that the correct stand which should be taken in favour of the poor and oppressed be spoiled by the logic of

contrasts and merciless struggles, and lead to a limited "horizontalism" filled with bitterness and emptied of authentic hope which draws away instead of bringing us close to Christ, man's only Saviour.

Today most people are less and less open to an eschatological future and live in the absence of hope. Their present life seems to be their only occasion for obtaining everything possible from it: always more, always faster. There is something desperate in this attitude especially when, as is almost always the case, it seems impossible that our desires be fulfilled. This situation most particularly concerns consecrated people who have taken the future as their profession of faith and eschatological hope as their motor of existence. Here the prophetic mission of consecrated life takes on particular importance. In this ambit it fulfils a specific ministry which, by analogy, we could in a way define as "priestly". In the Instruction "Starting again from Christ" we in fact read: "Imitating Jesus, those whom God calls to follow him are consecrated and sent into the world to continue his mission. In fact consecrated life itself, under the action of the Holy Spirit, becomes mission. The more consecrated people allow themselves to conform to Christ, the more they make him present and operating in history for the salvation of men. Open to the world's need as God sees it, they aim at a future which savours of resurrection and are ready to follow the example of Christ who came among us to give life and give it in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10)".

Also where charity is concerned, the Eucharist is the place where consecrated people can draw on new prophetic vigour for life in common and service to men. The Eucharist gives contemporariness to the cross on which Christ consumes himself, "descends into hell", becomes solidary with all those who were, who are and who will be prisoners of sin and death so that, in him, those who are far away may become brothers and approach the Father. It is at this school that consecrated people learn authentic zeal for

humanity and listen to the invitation to live their mission as a sharing of the death which characterizes the bodies and souls of men and women, in order to open them to hope beyond death. Illuminated by the Eucharistic celebration, consecrated life will learn how to become "the good Samaritan" in the manner of Christ and, with Christ's Spirit, will know how to propose paths of hope to all the men it will meet along the way. In the eucharistic celebration the memory of Jesus' violent death is transformed into "non violence", into the spontaneous gift of self. Jesus is not sacrificed, he sacrifices himself. The principle of opposition gives way to the principle of solidarity. The Eucharist is at the same time and indissolubly sacrifice, memory, nourishment. The Word which becomes flesh offers itself in sacrifice. Those who adhere to this mystery enter into communion with this gift of Christ and become in their turn "gift", since communion is linked with Christ's sacrifice in the eucharistic celebration (cf. Jn 6:49-58). When this gift, this entrusting of self to the Lord in the Eucharist, is not accepted the drama and laceration of Judas' betrayal is revived; we do like the people in the synagogue of Capharnaum who renounced following Jesus when he announced the gift of his flesh and the blood for the life of the world (cf. Jn 6:64-70). On the contrary, every pastoral activity, every service to the little ones, the poor, the sick, those abandoned by the wayside, becomes the fulfilment of Jesus' commandment: "Do this in memory of me" when it stems from a profound participation in the Eucharistic mystery. The fire of Christ's charity envelops everything and becomes commitment and gift of self. Consecrated life finds the strength to break out of "blocks", to overcome barriers, to prevail over closing in on itself, to illuminate the unilateral readings of reality. The "sacrificium laudis" of consecrated persons will thus express itself with new ardour for humanity and lead them to complete in their flesh "what is lacking in Christ's sufferings". Serving, being little, being joyous will always be rooted in the Lord's Pasch, welcomed, lived and borne for everyone's salvation.

Reflection by Cardinal Franc Rodé, 25 August 2005

MARCH

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MARCH

That the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation between persons and people may be understood and that the Church, through her testimony, may spread Christ's love, the source of new humanity.

11. In view of the risks which humanity is facing in our time, all Catholics in every part of the world have a duty to proclaim and embody ever more fully the "Gospel of Peace", and to show that acknowledgment of the full truth of God is the first, indispensable condition for consolidating the truth of peace. God is Love which saves, a loving Father who wants to see his children look upon one another as brothers and sisters, working responsibly to place their various talents at the service of the common good of the human family. God is the unfailing source of the hope which gives meaning to personal and community life. God, and God alone, brings to fulfilment every work of good and of peace. History has amply demonstrated that declaring war on God in order to eradicate him from human hearts only leads a fearful and impoverished humanity toward decisions which are ultimately futile. This realization must impel believers in Christ to become convincing witnesses of the God who is inseparably truth and love, placing themselves at the service of peace in broad cooperation with other Christians, the followers of other religions and with all men and women of good will.

(...)

13. All this must not, however, lead to a naive optimism. It must not be forgotten that, tragically, violent fratricidal conflicts and devastating wars still continue to sow tears and death in vast parts of the world. Situations exist where conflict, hidden like flame beneath ashes, can flare up anew and cause immense destruction. Those authorities who, rather than making every effort to promote peace, incite their citizens to hostility towards other nations, bear a heavy burden of responsibility: in regions particularly at risk, they

jeopardize the delicate balance achieved at the cost of patient negotiations and thus help make the future of humanity more uncertain and ominous. What can be said, too, about those governments which count on nuclear arms as a means of ensuring the security of their countries? Along with countless persons of good will, one can state that this point of view is not only baneful but also completely fallacious. In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims. The truth of peace requires that all - whether those governments which openly or secretly possess nuclear arms, or those planning to acquire them - agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament. The resources which would be saved could then be employed in projects of development capable of benefiting all their people, especially the poor.

15. The first to benefit from a decisive choice for disarmament will be the poor countries, which rightly demand, after having heard so many promises, the concrete implementation of their right to development. That right was solemnly reaffirmed in the recent General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, which this year celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of its foundation. The Catholic Church, while confirming her confidence in this international body, calls for the institutional and operative renewal which would enable it to respond to the changed needs of the present time, characterized by the vast phenomenon of globalization. The United Nations Organization must become a more efficient instrument for promoting the values of justice, solidarity and peace in the world. For her part, the Church, in fidelity to the mission she has received from her Founder, is committed to proclaiming everywhere "the Gospel of peace". In the firm conviction that she offers an indispensable service to all those who strive to promote peace, she reminds everyone that, if peace is to be authentic and lasting, it must be built on the bedrock of the truth about God and the truth about man. This truth alone can create a sensitivity to justice and openness to love and solidarity, while encouraging

everyone to work for a truly free and harmonious human family. The foundations of authentic peace rest on the truth about God and man.

16. At the conclusion of this Message, I would like to address a particular word to all believers in Christ, inviting them once again to be attentive and generous disciples of the Lord. When we hear the Gospel, dear brothers and sisters, we learn to build peace on the truth of a daily life inspired by the commandment of love. Every community should undertake an extensive process of education and witness aimed at making everyone more aware of the need for a fuller appreciation of the truth of peace. At the same time I ask for an increase of prayers, since peace is above all a gift of God, a gift to be implored incessantly. By God's help, our proclamation and witness to the truth of peace will be all the more convincing and illuminating. With confidence and filial abandonment let us lift up our eyes to Mary, Mother of the Prince of Peace. At the beginning of this New Year, let us ask her to help all God's People, wherever they may be, to work for peace and to be guided by the light of the truth that sets man free (cf. Jn 8:32). Through Mary's intercession, may all mankind grow in esteem for this fundamental good and strive to make it ever more present in our world, and, in this way, to offer a safer and more serene future to generations yet to come.

Benedict XVI
Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace
8 December 2005
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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCHARIST:

Mass: Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II (RM).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: We are to love one another: 1Jn 3:11-18.

Responsorial Psalm: God is love: Ps 103 (102).

Second reading: At the source of charity: 1Jn 4:7-12:20-21.

Gospel: The last judgment: Mt 25:31-46.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Why does the Lord insist that one must forgive seven times seven times?
2. Why is it so difficult to attain this?
3. Who suffers the most from it?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

Love of God and love of neighbour

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

In the gradual unfolding of this encounter, it is clearly revealed that love is not merely a sentiment. Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be a marvellous first spark, but it is not the fullness of love. Earlier we spoke of the process of purification and maturation by which *eros* comes fully into its own, becomes love in

the full meaning of the word. It is characteristic of mature love that it calls into play all man's potentialities; it engages the whole man, so to speak. Contact with the visible manifestations of God's love can awaken within us a feeling of joy born of the experience of being loved. But this encounter also engages our will and our intellect. Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the "yes" of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all- embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never "finished" and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself. *Idem velle atque idem nolle* (Sallust, *De coniuratione Catilinae*, XX, 4) - to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing-was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself (cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 11: CCL 27, 32). Then self- abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. Ps 73 [72]:23-28).

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That Christians, who are persecuted in many parts of the world and in various manners because of the Gospel, may continue, sustained by the strength of the Holy Spirit, to bear witness courageously and openly to the Word of God.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Consistory held in the past few days for the appointment of 15 new Cardinals was an intense ecclesial experience that enabled us to sample the spiritual riches of collegiality, of being together with brothers from various provenances, all of us sharing in one love for Christ and for his Church.

In a certain way we relived the reality of the first Christian community, gathered round Mary, Mother of Jesus, and Peter, to receive the gift of the Spirit and to commit themselves to spreading the Gospel throughout the world. Fidelity to this mission to the point of sacrificing their life is a distinctive feature of Cardinals, as their oath attests, and is, as it were, symbolized by scarlet, which is the colour of blood.

By a providential coincidence, the Consistory took place on 24 March, when we commemorated the missionaries who died during the past year on the frontiers of evangelization and in the service of humanity in various parts of the globe.

Thus, the Consistory was an opportunity to feel closer than ever to all those Christians who suffer persecution in the cause of the faith. Their witness, news of which we receive every day, and especially the sacrifice of those who were killed, is edifying to us and spurs us to make an ever more sincere and generous commitment to evangelize.

My thoughts go in particular to those communities who live in countries where religious freedom is lacking or where, despite the fact that it is allowed on paper, it is actually restricted in many ways. I send them warm encouragement to persevere patiently in the love of Christ, a seed of the Kingdom of God that is coming, indeed, already exists in the world.

On behalf of the entire Church, I would like to express the warmest solidarity to all who work at the service of the Gospel in these difficult situations, and at the same time I assure them of my daily remembrance in prayer.

The Church moves on in history and spreads throughout the earth accompanied by Mary, Queen of the Apostles. For Christians, as in the Upper Room, the Blessed Virgin always constitutes the living memorial of Jesus. It is she who enlivens their prayers and sustains their hope. Let us ask her to guide us on our daily journey and to protect with special love those Christian communities that live in conditions of greater difficulty and suffering.

*Benedict XVI
Angelus, 26 March 2006*

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APRIL

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APRIL

That Christians, even in the difficult and complex situations of present-day society, may not tire of proclaiming with their lives that Christ's resurrection is the source of hope and of peace.

(...)

Risen Lord: centre of life

In the same spirit I have come to Verona today to pray to the Lord with you, to share, even though briefly, in your work of these days, and to propose my Reflection to you on what appears of the first importance for the Christian presence in Italy.

You have made a very appropriate choice, putting the Risen Jesus Christ at the centre of the Convention's attention, and of all the life and witness of the Church in Italy. The Resurrection of Christ is a fact that occurred in history, of which the Apostles were witnesses and certainly not its inventors. At the same time, it was not simply a return to our earthly life. Instead, it is the greatest "mutation" that ever occurred, the decisive "jump" towards a profoundly new dimension of life, the entry into a decidedly different order that regards above all Jesus of Nazareth, but with him also us, the whole human family, history and the entire universe.

This is why the Resurrection of Christ is the centre of the preaching and the Christian witness from the beginning and until the end of time. Certainly, it is a great mystery, the mystery of our salvation, which finds its fulfilment in the Resurrection of the Incarnate Word and both anticipates and guarantees our hope. But the mark of this mystery is love, and only in the logic of love can it be brought close and somehow understood: Jesus Christ risen from the dead, because all of his being is perfectly and intimately united with God who is love, which is truly stronger than death. He was one with indestructible Life and therefore he could give his own life,

letting himself be killed, but he could not succumb to death definitively: at the Last Supper he concretely anticipated and accepted out of love his own death on the Cross, thus transforming it into the gift of himself, that gift which gives us life, liberty and salvation.

His Resurrection, therefore, has been like an explosion of light, an explosion of love that melts the chains of sin and death. It inaugurated a new dimension of life and reality, from which the new world comes forth, that continuously penetrates our world, transforming it and drawing it to himself.

All of this concretely happens through the life and witness of the Church; rather, the Church herself constitutes the first fruit of this transformation, which is God's work and not ours. It comes to us through faith and the Sacrament of Baptism, which is really death and resurrection, rebirth, transformation to a new life. It is what Saint Paul reveals in the Letter to the Galatians: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (2:20). Hence, the essential identity of my life is changed through Baptism, and I continue to exist only in this changed state.

My own self is taken away and I am filled with a new and greater subject, in which my "I" is still there but transformed, purified, "open" through the insertion into the Other, who acquires new space in my existence. Thus, we become "one in Christ" (Ga 3:28), a unique new subject, and our "I" is freed from its isolation.

"I, but no longer I": this is the formula of Christian existence established in Baptism, the formula of the resurrection in time, the formula of the Christian "novelty" called to transform the world. Here lies our Paschal joy. Our vocation and our Christian duty consist in cooperating so that they reach effective fulfilment in the daily reality of our life, what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us with Baptism. In fact, we are called to become new women and men, to

be able to be true witnesses of the Risen One and thus bearers of Christian joy and hope in the world, concretely in that community of men and women in which we live.

So, from this fundamental message of the Resurrection present in us and in our daily work, I come to the theme of the Church in Italy's service to the Nation, to Europe and to the world.

(...)

Showing the "yes" of faith

Dear brothers and sisters, now we must ask ourselves: how, and on what foundations, can we accomplish such a task? In this Convention you have rightly held it indispensable to give concrete, practicable content to Christian witness, examining how it can be carried out and developed in each of the great areas of human experience.

We will therefore be helped by not losing sight in our pastoral activity of the link between faith and daily life, between the Gospel proposition and the preoccupations and aspirations that most people have at heart. Thus, in these days you have reflected on the affective life and on the family, on work and on holidays, on education and the culture, on situations of poverty and illness, on the duties and responsibilities of social and political life.

Above all, I would like to emphasize for my part how, through this multiform witness, that great "yes" must emerge which God, through Jesus Christ, has said to man and to his life, to human love, to our freedom and our intelligence; how, therefore, faith in the God with a human face brings joy to the world.

Indeed, Christianity is open to all in cultures and society that is just, true and pure, to that which gladdens, consoles and strengthens our existence. Saint Paul in the Letter to the Philippians

wrote: "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (4:8).

So, the disciples of Christ recognize and gladly welcome the authentic values of the culture of our time, such as scientific knowledge and technological advancement, human rights, religious freedom, democracy. They do not overlook or undervalue, however, that dangerous fragility of human nature which is a threat for man's advancement in every historical context; in particular, they do not neglect the interior tensions and contradictions of our age.

Therefore, the work of evangelization is never a simple adaptation to culture, but it is always also a purification, a courageous break that leads to maturation and healing, an openness that brings to birth that "new creation" (2Co 5:17: Ga 6:15) which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

As I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, at the origin of the Christian being - and therefore at the origin of our witness as believers - there is no ethical decision or great idea, but the encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ, "which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (n. 1).

The fruitfulness of this encounter is also manifest in a peculiar and creative manner in the actual human and cultural context, above all in relation to reason which has given life to modern science and to the related technologies. A fundamental characteristic of the latter is, in fact, the systematic employment of mathematical instruments to be able to work with nature to harness its immense energies for our service.

Mathematics, as such, is a creation of our intelligence: the correspondence between its structures and the real structures of the

universe - which is the presupposition of all modern scientific and technological developments, already expressly formulated by Galileo Galilei with the famous affirmation that the book of nature is written in mathematical language - arouses our admiration and raises a big question.

It implies, in fact, that the universe itself is structured in an intelligent manner, such that a profound correspondence exists between our subjective reason and the objective reason in nature. It then becomes inevitable to ask oneself if there might not be a single original intelligence that is the common font of them both.

Thus, precisely the reflection on the development of science brings us towards the creator *Logos*. The tendency to give irrationality, chance and necessity the primacy is overturned, also to lead our intelligence and our freedom back to it. Upon these bases it again becomes possible to enlarge the area of our rationality, to reopen it to the larger questions of the truth and the good, to link theology, philosophy and science between them in full respect for the methods proper to them and of their reciprocal autonomy, but also in the awareness of the intrinsic unity that holds them together.

This is the task that is before us, a fascinating adventure that is worth our effort, to give a new thrust to the culture of our time and to restore the Christian faith to full citizenship in it.

The "cultural project" of the Church in Italy, with this object in view, is without doubt a happy intuition and can make a very important contribution. (...)

Benedict XVI
Address to the Participants of the
Fourth National Ecclesial Convention, 19 October 2006

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for Easter Sunday (RM).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: Witnesses of the Resurrection: Ac 10:37-43.

Responsorial Psalm: This is Christ the Lord's day: Ps 118 (117).

Second reading: A Christian's new life: 1Co 5:6-8.

Gospel: Remain with us!: Lk 24:13-35.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Is Jesus present in your life?
2. How can a Christian bear witness through his life to this presence?
3. Why is it that one is afraid to bear witness to it?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

Love - caritas - will always prove necessary

28/b) Love - *caritas* - will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable (cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 197, Vatican City 2004, p. 217). The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person -every person - needs: namely, loving personal concern. We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support. In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live "by bread alone" (Mt 4:4; cf. Dt 8:3) - a conviction that demeans man and ultimately disregards all that is specifically human.

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That the future priests of the young Churches may be constantly more formed culturally and spiritually to evangelize their nations and the whole world.

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I am pleased to be able to meet you on the occasion of the Update Seminar organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and I address my most cordial welcome to each one of you.

(...)

You are called to be Pastors among peoples, many of whom do not yet know Jesus Christ. As those primarily responsible for Gospel proclamation, you must therefore make a considerable effort to ensure that all are given the possibility of accepting him.

More and more, you are feeling the need to inculturate the Gospel, to evangelize cultures and to foster a sincere and open dialogue with one and all in order to build together a more brotherly and supportive humanity.

Only if you are impelled by the love of Christ can you bring to completion this apostolic task which demands the fearless zeal of men undaunted even by persecution and death for the Lord.

(...)

"Modern man", wrote my Predecessor of venerable memory, the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, "listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 41).

For this reason, it is only right that you give priority in your episcopal ministry to prayer and to the constant aspiration to holiness. It is important for you to ensure that your seminarians receive a sound formation and that your priests and catechists are given ongoing formation.

(...)

It is a cause of joy and consolation to note that in many of your Churches there is a constant flourishing of vocations to the priesthood and to the Religious life, a marvellous gift of God to be accepted and furthered with gratitude and enthusiasm. May it be your concern to equip seminaries with a sufficient number of carefully chosen and trained formation teachers who are first and foremost examples and models for the seminarians.

As you well know, the seminary is the heart of the Diocese, and this is why the Bishop should take a personal interest in it. The future of your communities and that of the universal Church depends on the training of future priests and of all the other pastoral workers, especially catechists.

Venerable and dear Brothers, in a few days' time you will be returning to your own Dioceses enriched by this formative stay in Rome.

I will continue to feel united with you in spirit and I ask you to convey the assurance of my affection and closeness in prayer to

your Communities, upon which I invoke the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy, Star of Evangelization, and the intercession of Saint Pius of Pietrelcina, whose liturgical memorial we are celebrating today.

With these sentiments, I impart my Blessing to you all, and gladly extend it to those who are entrusted to your care as Pastors, particularly the children, young people, the elderly, the sick, the poor and the suffering.

*Benedict XVI
Address to the Bishops
in the Formation update Meeting organized by the
Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples
23 September 2006*

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MAY

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MAY

That Christians may use literature, art and the mass media to greater advantage in order to favour a culture which defends and promotes the values of the human person.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In the wake of the fortieth-anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, I am happy to recall its Decree on the Means of Social Communication, *Inter Mirifica*, which in particular recognized the power of the media to influence the whole of human society. The need to harness that power for the benefit of all mankind has prompted me, in this my first message for World Communications Day, to reflect briefly on the idea of the media as a network facilitating communication, communion, and cooperation.

Saint Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, vividly depicts our human vocation to be "sharers in the divine nature" (*Dei Verbum*, 2): through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father; so we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, growing into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God (cf. Ep 2:18-22). This sublime portrayal of a life of communion engages all aspects of our lives as Christians. The call to be true to the self-communication of God in Christ is in fact a call to recognize his dynamic force within us, which then seeks to spread outwards to others, so that his love can truly become the prevalent measure of the world (cf. *Homily for World Youth Day*, Cologne, 21 August 2005).

2. Technological advances in the media have in certain respects conquered time and space, making communication between people, even when separated by vast distances, both instantaneous and direct. This development presents an enormous potential for

service of the common good and "constitutes a patrimony to safeguard and promote" (*Rapid Development*, 10). Yet, as we all know, our world is far from perfect. Daily we are reminded that immediacy of communication does not necessarily translate into the building of cooperation and communion in society.

To inform the consciences of individuals and help shape their thinking is never a neutral task. Authentic communication demands principled courage and resolve. It requires a determination of those working in the media not to wilt under the weight of so much information nor even to be content with partial or provisional truths. Instead it necessitates both seeking and transmitting what is the ultimate foundation and meaning of human, personal and social existence (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 5). In this way the media can contribute constructively to the propagation of all that is good and true.

3. The call for today's media to be responsible - to be the protagonist of truth and promoter of the peace that ensues - carries with it a number of challenges. While the various instruments of social communication facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and mutual understanding among groups, they are also tainted by ambiguity. Alongside the provision of a "great round table" for dialogue, certain tendencies within the media engender a kind of monoculture that dims creative genius, deflates the subtlety of complex thought and undervalues the specificity of cultural practices and the particularity of religious belief. These are distortions that occur when the media industry becomes self-serving or solely profit-driven, losing the sense of accountability to the common good.

Accurate reporting of events, full explanation of matters of public concern, and fair representation of diverse points of view must, then, always be fostered. The need to uphold and support marriage and family life is of particular importance, precisely because it pertains to the foundation of every culture and society (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). In cooperation with parents, the

social communications and entertainment industries can assist in the difficult but sublimely satisfying vocation of bringing up children, through presenting edifying models of human life and love (cf. *Inter Mirifica*, 11). How disheartening and destructive it is to us all when the opposite occurs. Do not our hearts cry out, most especially, when our young people are subjected to debased or false expressions of love which ridicule the God-given dignity of every human person and undermine family interests? (...)

Benedict XVI

Message for the 40th World Communications Day

24 January 2006

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for the progress of peoples (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: The dignity of man, created in the image of God: Gn 1:26-31.

Responsorial Psalm: Lord, how great your name throughout the earth!: Ps 8.

Second reading: May each person place the graces he has received in the service of others: 1P 4:7-11.

Gospel: Insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me: Mt 25:31-46.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What values do you most esteem in a human being?
2. How can these values be promoted?
3. Does any book, any image, any mass media program proclaim these human values? How can one make good choices for oneself and one's children?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

The Eucharist

14. Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental "mysticism" is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1Co 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become "one body", completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus' teaching on love. The transition which he makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbour, and his grounding the whole life of faith on this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality-something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization. Faith, worship and *ethos* are

interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's *agape*. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. "Worship" itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely, as we shall have to consider in greater detail below, the "commandment" of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be "commanded" because it has first been given.

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That the Virgin Mary, Star of evangelization and Queen of the Apostles, may still guide today with maternal affection the missionaries, both men and women, throughout the world, just as she accompanied the Apostles in the early stages of the Church.

The Holy Spirit desires unity, he desires totality. Therefore, his presence is finally shown above all in missionary zeal. Anyone who has come across something true, beautiful and good in his life - the one true treasure, the precious pearl - hastens to share it everywhere, in the family and at work, in all the contexts of his life. He does so without any fear, because he knows he has received adoption as a son; without any presumption, for it is all a gift; without discouragement, for God's Spirit precedes his action in people's "hearts" and as a seed in the most diverse cultures and religions. He does so without restraint, for he bears a piece of good news which is for all people and for all the peoples.

Dear friends, I ask you to collaborate even more, very much more, in the Pope's universal apostolic ministry, opening doors to Christ.

This is the Church's best service for men and women and especially for the poor, so that the person's life, a fairer order in society and peaceful coexistence among the nations may find in Christ the cornerstone on which to build the genuine civilization, the civilization of love.

The Holy Spirit gives believers a superior vision of the world, of life, of history, and makes them custodians of the hope that never disappoints.

Let us pray to God the Father, therefore, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that the celebration of the Solemnity of Pentecost may be like an ardent flame and a blustering wind for Christian life and for the mission of the whole Church.

I place the intentions of your Movements and Communities in the heart of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, present in the Upper Room together with the Apostles; may she be the one who implores God to grant them.

Upon all of you I invoke an outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit, so that in our time too, we may have the experience of a renewed Pentecost. Amen!

*Benedict XVI
Homily on the Prayer Vigil of Pentecost
Meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and new Communities
3 June 2006*

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JUNE

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JUNE

That all Christians may cultivate a deep and personal friendship with Christ, in order to be able to communicate the strength of his love to every person they meet.

(...)

The deepest meaning of this devotion to God's love is revealed solely through a more attentive consideration of its contribution not only to the knowledge, but also and especially to the personal experience of this love in trusting dedication to its service (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, n. 62).

It is obvious that experience and knowledge cannot be separated: the one refers to the other. Moreover, it is essential to emphasize that true knowledge of God's love is only possible in the context of an attitude of humble prayer and generous availability.

Starting with this interior attitude, one sees that the gaze fixed upon his side, pierced by the spear, is transformed into silent adoration. Gazing at the Lord's pierced side, from which "blood and water" flowed (cf. Jn 19:34), helps us to recognize the manifold gifts of grace that derive from it (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, nn. 34-41) and opens us to all other forms of Christian worship embraced by the devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

Faith, understood as a fruit of the experience of God's love, is a grace, a gift of God. Yet human beings will only be able to experience faith as a grace to the extent that they accept it within themselves as a gift on which they seek to live. Devotion to the love

of God, to which the Encyclical *Haurietis aquas* invited the faithful (cf. n. 72), must help us never to forget that he willingly took this suffering upon himself "for us", "for me".

When we practise this devotion, not only do we recognize God's love with gratitude but we continue to open ourselves to this love so that our lives are ever more closely patterned upon it. God, who poured out his love "into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (cf. Rm 5:5), invites us tirelessly to accept his love. The main aim of the invitation to give ourselves entirely to the saving love of Christ and to consecrate ourselves to it (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, n. 4) is, consequently, to bring about our relationship with God.

This explains why the devotion, which is totally oriented to the love of God who sacrificed himself for us, has an irreplaceable importance for our faith and for our life in love.

Whoever inwardly accepts God is moulded by him. The experience of God's love should be lived by men and women as a "calling" to which they must respond. Fixing our gaze on the Lord, who "took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Mt 8:17), helps us to become more attentive to the suffering and need of others.

Adoring contemplation of the side pierced by the spear makes us sensitive to God's salvific will. It enables us to entrust ourselves to his saving and merciful love, and at the same time strengthens us in the desire to take part in his work of salvation, becoming his instruments.

The gifts received from the open side, from which "blood and water" flowed (cf. Jn 19:34), ensure that our lives will also become for others a source from which "rivers of living water" flow (Jn 7:38; cf. *Deus caritas est*, n. 7).

The experience of love, brought by the devotion to the pierced side of the Redeemer, protects us from the risk of withdrawing into ourselves and makes us readier to live for others. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1Jn 3:16; cf. *Haurietis aquas*, n. 38).

It was only the experience that God first gave us his love that has enabled us to respond to his commandment of love (cf. *Deus caritas est*, n. 14).

So it is that the cult of love, which becomes visible in the mystery of the Cross presented anew in every celebration of the Eucharist, lays the foundations of our capacity to love and to make a gift of ourselves (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, n. 69), becoming instruments in Christ's hands: only in this way can we be credible proclaimers of his love.

However, this opening of ourselves to God's will must be renewed in every moment: "Love is never "finished" and complete" (cf. *Deus caritas est*, n. 17).

Thus, looking at the "side pierced by the spear" from which shines forth God's boundless desire for our salvation cannot be considered a transitory form of worship or devotion: the adoration of

God's love, whose historical and devotional expression is found in the symbol of the "pierced heart", remains indispensable for a living relationship with God (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, n. 62).

As I express the wish that the 50th anniversary will give rise to an ever more fervent response to love of the Heart of Christ in numerous hearts, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Most Reverend Father Kolvenbach, and to all the Religious of the Society of Jesus, who are still very active in promoting this fundamental devotion.

Benedict XVI
Letter on occasion of the 50th Anniversary
of the Encyclical "Haurietis aquas"
15 May 2006

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Year A (RM).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: The Lord your God chose you to be his people: Dt 7:6-11.

Responsorial Psalm: God is love: Ps 103 (102).

Second reading: He who does not love has not known God: 1Jn 4:7-16.

Gospel: The Heart of Jesus: Mt 11:25-30.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Saint Teresa of Lisieux called Jesus "my friend". How do you call him?
2. Do you speak with Jesus "as a friend to a friend"? How can one attain this?
3. The mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart. How do you bear witness to the love of Jesus which dwells in your heart?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

The Heart of Christ

The Redeemer's pierced side is the source to which the Encyclical *Haurietis aquas* refers us: we must draw from this source to attain true knowledge of Jesus Christ and a deeper experience of his love. Thus, we will be able to understand better what it means *to know* God's love in Jesus Christ, *to experience* him, keeping our gaze fixed on him to the point that we *live* entirely on the experience of his love, so that we can subsequently *witness* to it to others.

Indeed, to take up a saying of my venerable Predecessor John Paul II, "*In the Heart of Christ, man's heart learns to know the*

genuine and unique meaning of his life and of his destiny, to understand the value of an authentically Christian life, to keep himself from certain perversions of the human heart, and to unite the filial love for God and the love of neighbour".

Thus: *"The true reparation asked by the Heart of the Saviour will come when the civilization of the Heart of Christ can be built upon the ruins heaped up by hatred and violence" (Letter to Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, 5 October 1986).*

In the Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, I cited the affirmation in the First Letter of Saint John: "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us", in order to emphasize that being Christian begins with the encounter with a Person (cf. n. 1).

Since God revealed himself most profoundly in the Incarnation of his Son in whom he made himself "visible", it is in our relationship with Christ that we can recognize who God really is (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, nn. 29-41; *Deus caritas est*, nn. 12-15).

And again: since the deepest expression of God's love is found in the gift Christ made of his life for us on the Cross, the deepest expression of God's love, it is above all by looking at his suffering and his death that we can see God's infinite love for us more and more clearly: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Moreover, not only does this mystery of God's love for us constitute the content of the worship of and devotion to the Heart of

Jesus, but in the same way it is likewise the content of all true spirituality and Christian devotion. It is consequently important to stress that the basis of the devotion is as old as Christianity itself.

Indeed, it is only possible to be Christian by fixing our gaze on the Cross of our Redeemer, "on him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19:37; cf. Zc 12:10).

The Encyclical *Haurietis aquas* rightly recalls that for countless souls the wound in Christ's side and the marks left by the nails have been "the chief sign and symbol of that love" that ever more incisively shaped their life from within (cf. n. 52).

Recognizing God's love in the Crucified One became an inner experience that prompted them to confess, together with Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28), and enabled them to acquire a deeper faith by welcoming God's love unreservedly (cf. *Haurietis aquas*, n. 49).

Benedict XVI
Letter on occasion of the 50th anniversary
of the Encyclical "Haurietis aquas"

15 May 2006

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MISSION INTENTION

That the International Eucharistic Congress of Quebec in Canada may lead to an ever greater understanding that the Eucharist is the heart of the Church and the source of evangelization.

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

(...)

I cordially greet the Members of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses and the National Delegates who have taken part in this Meeting in order to prepare together for the upcoming 49th International Eucharistic Congress. It is scheduled to take place in Quebec in June 2008.

I next greet the representatives of the Local Preparatory Committee of this great ecclesial event, as well as the small but significant group of Adorers of the Eucharist.

You come from various parts of the world and the purpose of your Meeting is to prepare for this International Eucharistic Congress: a celebration of special importance to the whole of the Church. As Cardinal Jozef Tomko has just recalled, it constitutes a unanimous response of the People of God to the Lord's love, supremely manifested in the Mystery of the Eucharist.

It is true! The Eucharistic Congresses that take place from time to time in different places and on different continents are always a source of spiritual renewal, an opportunity to become better acquainted with the Blessed Eucharist, which is the most precious treasure Christ has bequeathed to us. They are also an encouragement to the Church to spread Christ's love in every social milieu and to witness to it unhesitatingly.

Moreover, ever since your praiseworthy Pontifical Committee was established, its proposed goal is "to make ever better known, loved and served Our Lord Jesus Christ in his Eucharistic Mystery, the centre of the Church's life and of her mission for the world's salvation". Each one of these Eucharistic Congresses therefore represents a providential opportunity to solemnly show to humanity: "The Eucharist, a gift of God for the life of the world", as the basic text for the upcoming Congress says. This Document was presented during your Meeting by Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Archbishop of Quebec, to whom I address a special greeting. Not only those who have the opportunity to take part in person but also the various Christian communities who are invited to join it in spirit will be able to benefit from the special graces that the Lord will dispense at the International Eucharistic Congress.

In those days, the Catholic world will keep the eyes of its heart on the supreme mystery of the Eucharist in order to draw from it a new apostolic and missionary impetus. This is why it is important to prepare oneself well and I thank you, dear brothers and sisters, for the work you are carrying out to help the faithful on every continent to understand ever better the value and importance of the Eucharist in our lives.

Furthermore, the presence among you of several representatives of the Adorers of the Eucharist and the mention that you made, Cardinal Tomko, to the "Federación Mundial de la Adoración Nocturna", enables me to recall how helpful the rediscovery of Eucharistic Adoration is for many Christians.

In this regard, I am pleased to think back to my experience last year with the young people in Cologne on the occasion of World Youth Day, and in Saint Peter's Square with the children preparing for their First Communion accompanied by their families and catechists.

How great is humanity's need today to rediscover the source of its hope in the Sacrament of the Eucharist! I thank the Lord because many parishes, as well as celebrating Holy Mass devoutly, are educating the faithful in Eucharistic Adoration, and I hope also in view of the upcoming International Eucharistic Congress that this practice will continue to spread.

Dear brothers and sisters, as you well know, the next Post-Synodal Exhortation will be dedicated to the Eucharist. It will present the suggestions that were made at the last Synod of Bishops, dedicated precisely to the Eucharistic Mystery, and I am sure that this Document will also help the Church to prepare and to celebrate with interior participation the Eucharistic Congress that will be taking place in June 2008.

From this moment, I entrust it to the Virgin Mary, the first and incomparable adorer of Christ in the Eucharist. May Our Lady protect and accompany each one of you and your communities and make the work you are doing fruitful, with a view to the important ecclesial event in Quebec.

For my part, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and warmly bless you all.

*Benedict XVI
Address to the participants
in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Committee
for International Eucharistic Congresses
9 November 2006*

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JULY

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JULY

That there may be an increase in the number of those who, as volunteers, offer their services to the Christian Community with generous and prompt availability.

Dear Friends,

I have come very gladly to visit you in the atmosphere of the Christmas festivities and at the beginning of a new year which I hope will be peaceful for everyone. The Christmas context makes our meeting even more friendly, as it is taking place in an important setting in the city of Rome, a place rich in humanity.

(...)

I offer my warmest greeting to you who benefit daily from this *Caritas* Soup Kitchen, and I would like to reach out with my thoughts to all your friends who come from almost all the countries of the world and live in this city.

At this Soup Kitchen - which in a certain way could be considered the symbol of the Rome *Caritas*, - in this inn, as your spokesman said, it is possible to feel Christ's presence tangibly in the brethren who are hungry and in those who offer them food. Here, one can experience that when we love our neighbour, we become better acquainted with God: in the Bethlehem Grotto, in fact, he made himself manifest to us in the poverty of a newborn baby, in need of everything.

The Christmas message is simple: God came among us because he loves us and expects our love. God is love: not a sentimental love, but a love that became a total gift to the point of the sacrifice on the Cross, starting from his birth in the grotto in Bethlehem.

The beautiful crib that you have chosen to set up in your Soup Kitchen and which I have just had the opportunity to admire,

speaks to us of this real and divine love. In its simplicity, the crib tells us that love and poverty go together, as is also taught by one who was deeply in love with Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi.

At Christmas, God made himself man because he is concerned about man, every man. And Saint Gregory of Nazianzus said he became man because he personally wished to experience what it means to be a man, what it really means to live in poverty. The great God wanted to experience human life himself, with all its suffering and with all the needs of the human being. The newborn Jesus was laid in the manger at Bethlehem, a name which, as you know, means "house of bread".

Actually, Jesus, "the Bread which comes down from Heaven", "the Bread of life" (cf. Jn 6:32-51), becomes visible every day in a certain way in this Soup Kitchen, where there is a desire not only to eat food - eating is certainly important - but also to serve the person without distinction of race, religion or culture.

"Suffering man belongs to us", said my unforgettable Predecessor, John Paul II, after whom we have named the Soup Kitchen this very day. From the Grotto of Bethlehem, from every crib, a proclamation emanates that is addressed to everyone: Jesus loves us and teaches us to love, he challenges us to love. May those in charge, the volunteers and all who come to the Soup Kitchen experience the beauty of this love; may they feel the depth of the joy that springs from it, a joy that is certainly different from that deceptive illusory one publicized by advertisements.

We will soon be concluding our meeting by raising our prayers to the Lord. He is very familiar with the material and spiritual needs of everyone present here. I would like to pray to him, in particular, to continue to protect all the people in the Rome *Caritas* who carry out a precious act of solidarity here and in other points of the city. May the Holy Spirit enliven the hearts of those in

charge and of all the workers and volunteers so that they may carry out their service with an ever more aware dedication, inspired by the authentic style of Christian love which the saints of charity have summed up in the motto: *good should be done well*.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, Mother of each one of us, watch lovingly over everyone.

I warmly bless you all.

Benedict XVI
Visit to the Soup Kitchen run by the
Rome Caritas on the Colle Oppio, 4 January 2007
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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Ritual Mass for Confirmation (RM).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: I will put a new spirit in you: Ezk 36:24-28.

Responsorial Psalm: Send, Lord, your Spirit and renew the face of the earth: Ps 103.

Second reading: The different manifestations of the Spirit: 1Co 12:4-13.

Gospel: Those who listen to the word with a good and sincere heart: Lk 8:4-15.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What services does a Christian community need?
2. It is often said that it is always the same people who are ready to be serviceable. How can this be remedied?
3. Which service requires the greatest discretion?

PRAYER – MEDITATION

The personnel

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

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That the World Youth Day held in Sydney, Australia, may awaken the fire of divine love in young people and make them sowers of hope for a new humanity.

(...)

"Dare to love" by following the example of the saints

My dear young friends, I want to invite you to "dare to love". Do not desire anything less for your life than a love that is strong and beautiful and that is capable of making the whole of your existence a joyful undertaking of giving yourselves as a gift to God and your brothers and sisters, in imitation of the One who vanquished hatred and death forever through love (cf. Rv 5:13). Love is the only force capable of changing the heart of the human person and of all humanity, by making fruitful the relations between men and women, between rich and poor, between cultures and civilizations. This is shown to us in the lives of the saints. They are true friends of God who channel and reflect this very first love. Try to know them better, entrust yourselves to their intercession, and strive to live as they did. I shall just mention Mother Teresa. In order to respond instantly to the cry of Jesus, "I thirst", a cry that had touched her deeply, she began to take in the people who were dying on the streets of Calcutta in India. From that time onward, the only desire of her life was to quench the thirst of love felt by Jesus, not with words, but with concrete action by recognizing his disfigured countenance thirsting for love in the faces of the poorest of the poor. Blessed Teresa put the teachings of the Lord into practice: *"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"* (Mt 25:40). The message of this humble witness of divine love has spread around the whole world.

The secret of love

Each one of us, my dear friends, has been given the possibility of reaching this same level of love, but only by having

recourse to the indispensable support of divine Grace. Only the Lord's help will allow us to keep away from resignation when faced with the enormity of the task to be undertaken. It instils in us the courage to accomplish that which is humanly inconceivable. Above all, the Eucharist is the great school of love. When we participate regularly and with devotion in Holy Mass, when we spend a sustained time of adoration in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, it is easier to understand the length, breadth, height and depth of his love that goes beyond all knowledge (cf. Ep 3:17-18). By sharing the Eucharistic Bread with our brothers and sisters of the Church community, we feel compelled, like Our Lady with Elizabeth, to render "in haste" the love of Christ into generous service towards our brothers and sisters.

Towards the encounter in Sydney

On this subject, the recommendation of the apostle John is illuminating: *"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth"* (1Jn 3:18-19). Dear young people, it is in this spirit that I invite you to experience the next World Youth Day together with your bishops in your respective dioceses. This will be an important stage on the way to the meeting in Sydney where the theme will be: *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses"* (Ac 1:8). May Mary, the Mother of Christ and of the Church, help you to let that cry ring out everywhere, the cry that has changed the world: "God is love!" I am together with you all in prayer and extend to you my heartfelt blessing.

*Benedict XVI
Message to the Youth of the World
on the occasion of the 22nd World Youth Day
27 January 2007*

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AUGUST

AUGUST

That the human family may know how to respect God's design for the world and thus become ever more aware of the great gift of God which Creation represents for us.

Psalm 135,1-9

"His mercy endures for ever!"

Evening Prayer - Monday of Week Four

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. This Psalm was called "the Great Hallel", that is, the grandiose and solemn praise that the Jews intoned during their Passover liturgy. We are referring to Psalm 136(135), whose first part we have just heard, in accordance with the way the Liturgy of Vespers divides it (cf. vv. 1-9).

Let us first reflect on the refrain "for his mercy endures for ever". At the centre of the phrase the word "mercy" rings out. In fact, it is a legitimate but limited translation of the original Hebrew term *hesed*. This is actually a word that belongs to the characteristic terminology used in the Bible to express the Covenant that exists between the Lord and his People. The term seeks to define the attitudes deriving from this relationship: faithfulness, loyalty, love, and of course, God's mercy.

We have here a concise summary that portrays the deep, personal bond established by the Creator with his creature. With this relationship, God does not appear in the Bible as an impassive and implacable Lord against whose mysterious power it is useless to struggle.

Instead, he shows himself as a person who loves his creatures, watches over them, follows them on their way through

history and suffers because of the infidelities with which the people often oppose his *hesed*, his merciful and fatherly love.

2. The first visible sign of this divine love, says the Psalmist, is to be sought in creation and then in history. The gaze, full of admiration and wonder, will rest first of all on creation: the skies, the earth, the seas, the sun, the moon and the stars.

Even before discovering the God who reveals himself in the history of a people, there is a cosmic revelation, open to all, offered to the whole of humanity by the one Creator, "God of gods" and "Lord of lords" (cf. vv. 2, 3).

As sung in Psalm 19(18): "The heavens proclaim the glory of God and the firmament shows forth the work of his hands. Day unto day takes up the story and night unto night makes known the message" (vv. 2-3). Thus, a divine message exists, secretly engraved in creation and a sign of the *hesed*, the loving fidelity of God who gives his creatures being and life, water and food, light and time.

A clear vision is essential in order to contemplate this divine revelation, recalling the recommendation of the Book of Wisdom that invites us to recognize "the greatness and the beauty of created things, [whose] original author, by analogy, is seen" (Ws 13:5; cf. Rm 1:20).

Prayerful praise, therefore, flows from contemplation of the "marvellous works" (cf. Ps 136(135):4) that God has wrought in creation that are transformed into a joyful hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

3. Consequently, we rise from the works of creation to the greatness of God and to his loving mercy. This is what we are taught by the Fathers of the Church, in whose voices resound the constant Christian *Tradition*. Thus, Saint Basil the Great, in one of the initial

pages of his first homily on the Hexaemeron, where he comments on the creation narrative in the first chapter of Genesis, pauses to consider God's wise action and is brought to recognize God's goodness as the dynamic centre of creation. The following are several sayings from the long reflection of the Holy Bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". My words give way, overwhelmed by wonder at this thought" (1, 2, 1: *Sulla Genesi [Omelie sull'Esamerone]*, Milan, 1990, pp. 9, 11).

In fact, even if some, "deceived by the atheism they bore within them, imagined that the universe lacked guidance and order, at the mercy as it were of chance", the sacred author instead "immediately enlightened our minds with the Name of God at the beginning of the account, saying: "In the beginning... God created...". And what beauty there is in this order!" (1, 2, 3: *ibid.*, p. 11).

"So if the world has a beginning and has been created, it seeks the One who gave it being and is its Creator.... Moses prepared you with his teaching, impressing in our souls as a seal and amulet the Most Holy Name of God, when he says: "In the beginning God created". Blessed nature, goodness exempt from envy, the one who is the object of love to all reasonable beings, beauty in addition to everything else that is desirable, the principle of beings, the source of life, the light of the mind, inaccessible wisdom, in brief, it is he who "in the beginning created the heavens and the earth"" (1, 2, 6-7: *ibid.*, p. 13).

I find the words of this fourth-century Father surprisingly up to date when he says: Some people, "deceived by the atheism they bore within them, imagined that the universe lacked guidance and order, at the mercy as it were of chance". How many these "some people" are today! Deceived by atheism they consider and seek to prove that it is scientific to think that all things lack guidance and

order as though they were at the mercy of chance. The Lord through Sacred Scripture reawakens our reason which has fallen asleep and tells us: in the beginning was the creative Word. In the beginning the creative Word - this Word that created all things, that created this intelligent design which is the cosmos - is also love.

Therefore, let us allow this Word of God to awaken us; let us pray that it will additionally illumine our minds so that we can perceive the message of creation - also written in our hearts - that the beginning of all things is creative wisdom, and this wisdom is love, it is goodness: "his mercy endures for ever".

Benedict XVI
General Audience, 9 November 2005

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for after the harvest (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: Remember the Lord who gave you the riches of the earth: Dt 8:7-18.

Responsorial Psalm: Your name is great, Lord, throughout the earth: Ps 8.

Second reading: We cannot take the goods of this world to life after death: 1Tm 6:6-11.17-19.

Gospel: Use the goods of this earth in a measured way: Lk 12:15-21.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Why must respect for creation be considered a task rooted in our Christian spirituality?
2. How can we bear witness to our respect for creation?
3. Is it worth it?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

The newness of biblical faith

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

on the other hand, loves with a personal love. His love, moreover, is an elective love: among all the nations he chooses Israel and loves her - but he does so precisely with a view to healing the whole human race. God loves, and his love may certainly be called *eros*, yet it is also totally *agape* (cf. Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, who in his treatise *The Divine Names*, IV, 12-14: PG 3, 709-713 calls God both *eros* and *agape*).

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That the answer of the entire people of God to the common vocation to sanctity and mission may be promoted and fostered, with careful discernment of the charisms and a constant commitment to spiritual and cultural formation.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Servants of God *Charles de Foucauld*, a priest; *Maria Pia Mastena*, Foundress of the Institute of the Sisters of the Holy Face; and *Maria Crocifissa Curcio*, Foundress of the Congregation of Carmelite Missionary Sisters of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, were beatified this morning in Saint Peter's Basilica.

They are being added to the multitude of Blesseds who were held up for the veneration of the Ecclesial Communities in which they lived during the Pontificate of John Paul II, in the awareness of what the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council strongly emphasized, that all baptized persons are called to the perfection of Christian life:

priests, Religious and lay people, each in accordance with his or her own charism and specific vocation.

In fact, the Council paid great attention to the role of the lay faithful. It dedicated to them an entire chapter - the fourth - of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, defining their vocation and mission, which is rooted in Baptism and Confirmation and whose purpose is to "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" (n. 31).

On 18 November 1965 the Fathers approved a specific Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. It stressed first of all that "the fruitfulness of the apostolate of lay people depends on their living union with Christ" (n. 4), that is, on a vigorous spirituality nourished by active participation in the Liturgy and expressed in the style of the Gospel Beatitudes.

For lay people, moreover, professional competence, a sense of family, a civic sense and the social virtues are of great importance. Although it is true that they are called individually to bear their personal witness, particularly precious wherever the freedom of the Church encounters obstacles, the Council nonetheless insisted on the importance of the organized apostolate, essential if an effect is to be made on the general mindset, social conditions and institutions (cf. *ibid.*, n. 18).

In this regard, the Fathers encouraged the numerous associations of lay people and insisted on their formation in the apostolate. Beloved Pope John Paul II chose to dedicate the Synod Assembly in 1987 to the topic of the vocation and mission of lay people, which was followed by the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*.

To conclude, I would like to recall that last Sunday, in the Cathedral of Vicenza, the mother of a family was beatified; she was known as "Mamma Rosa" and was a model of Christian life in the lay state.

Let us entrust the entire People of God to all those who are now in the heavenly homeland, to all our Saints, and in the first place to Mary Most Holy and her Husband, Joseph, so that the awareness of being called to work with commitment and productivity in the Lord's vineyard may increase in every baptized person.

*Benedict XVI
Angelus
13 November 2005*

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SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER

That those who, because of wars or oppressive regimes, are forced to leave their homes and country may be supported by Christians in the defence and protection of their rights.

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

On the occasion of the coming World Day of Migrants and Refugees, and looking at the Holy Family of Nazareth, icon of all families, I would like to invite you to reflect on the condition of the migrant family. The evangelist Matthew narrates that shortly after the birth of Jesus, Joseph was forced to leave for Egypt by night, taking the child and his mother with him, in order to flee the persecution of king Herod (cf. Mt 2:13-15). Making a comment on this page of the Gospel, my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pope Pius XII, wrote in 1952: "The family of Nazareth in exile, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, emigrants and taking refuge in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are the model, the example and the support of all emigrants and pilgrims of every age and every country, of all refugees of any condition who, compelled by persecution and need, are forced to abandon their homeland, their beloved relatives, their neighbours, their dear friends, and move to a foreign land" (*Exsul familia*, AAS 44, 1952, 649). In this misfortune experienced by the Family of Nazareth, obliged to take refuge in Egypt, we can catch a glimpse of the painful condition in which all migrants live, especially, refugees, exiles, evacuees, internally displaced persons, those who are persecuted. We can take a quick look at the difficulties that every migrant family lives through, the hardships and humiliations, the deprivation and fragility of millions and millions of migrants, refugees and internally displaced people. The Family of Nazareth reflects the image of God safeguarded in the heart of every human family, even if disfigured and weakened by emigration.

The theme of the next World Day of Migrants and Refugees – *The migrant family* – is in continuity with those of 1980, 1986 and 1993. It intends to underline further the commitment of the Church not only in favour of the individual migrant, but also of his family, which is a place and resource of the culture of life and a factor for the integration of values. The migrant's family meets many difficulties. The distance of its members from one another and unsuccessful reunification often result in breaking the original ties. New relationships are formed and new affections arise. Some migrants forget the past and their duties, as they are subjected to the hard trial of distance and solitude. If the immigrant family is not ensured of a real possibility of inclusion and participation, it is difficult to expect its harmonious development. The International Convention for the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families, which was enforced on July 1st, 2003, intends to defend men and women migrant workers and the members of their respective families. This means that the value of the family is recognized, also in the sphere of emigration, which is now a structural phenomenon of our societies. The Church encourages the ratification of the international legal instruments that aim to defend the rights of migrants, refugees and their families and, through its various Institutions and Associations, offers its advocacy that is becoming more and more necessary. To this end, it has opened Centres where migrants are listened to, Houses where they are welcomed, Offices for services offered to persons and families, with other initiatives set up to respond to the growing needs in this field.

Much is already being done for the integration of the families of immigrants, although much still remains to be done. There are real difficulties connected with some "defence mechanisms" on the part of the first generation immigrants, which run the risk of becoming an obstacle to the greater maturity of the young people of the second generation. This is why it is necessary to provide for legislative, juridical and social intervention to facilitate

such an integration. In recent times, there is an increase in the number of women who leave their countries of origin in search of better conditions of life, in view of more promising professional prospects. However, women who end up as victims of trafficking of human beings and of prostitution are not few in number. In family reunification, social workers, especially religious women, can render an appreciated service of mediation that merits our gratitude more and more.

Regarding the integration of the families of immigrants, I feel it my duty to call your attention to the families of refugees, whose conditions seem to have become worse in comparison with the past, also specifically regarding the reunification of family nuclei. In the camps assigned to them, in addition to logistic difficulties, and those of a personal character linked to the trauma and emotional stress caused by the tragic experiences they went through, sometimes there is also the risk of women and children being involved in sexual exploitation, as a survival mechanism. In these cases an attentive pastoral presence is necessary. Aside from giving assistance capable of healing the wounds of the heart, pastoral care should also offer the support of the Christian community, able to restore the culture of respect and have the true value of love found again. It is necessary to encourage those who are interiorly-wrecked to recover trust in themselves. Everything must also be done to guarantee the rights and dignity of the families and to assure them housing facilities according to their needs. Refugees are asked to cultivate an open and positive attitude towards their receiving society and maintain an active willingness to accept offers to participate in building together an integrated community that would be a "common household" for all.

Among migrants, there is a category that needs to be considered in a special way: the students from other countries, who are far from home, without an adequate knowledge of the language, at times without friends and often with a scholarship that is

insufficient for their needs. Their condition is even worse if they are married. Through its institutions, the Church exerts every effort to render the absence of family support for these young students less painful. It helps them integrate in the cities that receive them, by putting them in contact with families that are willing to offer them hospitality and facilitate knowing one another. As I had the opportunity to say on another occasion, helping foreign students is "an important field of pastoral action... Indeed, young people who leave their own country in order to study encounter many problems and especially the risk of an identity crisis" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 December 2005).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, may the World Day of Migrants and Refugees become a useful occasion to build awareness, in the ecclesial community and public opinion, regarding the needs and problems, as well as the positive potentialities of migrant families. My thoughts go in a special way to those who are directly involved in the vast phenomenon of migration, and to those who expend their pastoral energy in the service of human mobility. The words of the apostle Paul, "*caritas Christi urget nos*" (2Co 5:14), urge us to give ourselves preferentially to our brothers and sisters who are most in need. With these sentiments, I invoke divine assistance on each one and I affectionately impart to all a special Apostolic Blessing.

Benedict XVI
Message for the 93rd World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2007)
18 October 2006

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for emigrants or refugees (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: The Lord loves the stranger, he gives him bread and clothing: Dt 10:17-19.

Responsorial Psalm: Blessed is the Lord, he does not abandon the poor man: Tb 12:8-16.

Second reading: Make hospitality your special care: Rm 12:9-16.

Gospel: Who is my neighbour?: Lk 10:25-37.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What are the immediate problems which affect the refugees established in your city or country?
2. What organizations help resolve these problems?
3. What contribution can a local community bring?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour

15. This principle is the starting-point for understanding the great parables of Jesus. The rich man (cf. Lk 16:19-31) begs from his place of torment that his brothers be informed about what happens to those who simply ignore the poor man in need. Jesus takes up this cry for help as a warning to help us return to the right path. The parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37) offers two particularly important clarifications. Until that time, the concept of "neighbour" was understood as referring essentially to one's countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel;

in other words, to the closely-knit community of a single country or people. This limit is now abolished. Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour. The concept of "neighbour" is now universalized, yet it remains concrete. Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now. The Church has the duty to interpret ever anew this relationship between near and far with regard to the actual daily life of her members. Lastly, we should especially mention the great parable of the Last Judgement (cf. Mt 25:31-46), in which love becomes the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's worth or lack thereof. Jesus identifies himself with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Love of God and love of neighbour have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That, faithful to the sacrament of matrimony, every Christian family may cultivate the values of love and communion in order to be a small evangelizing community, sensitive and open to the material and spiritual needs of its brothers.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this last Sunday of the year we are celebrating the *Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth*. I address with joy all the families of

the world, wishing them the peace and love that Jesus brought us in coming among us at Christmas.

In the Gospel we do not find discourses on the family but an *event* which is worth more than any words: God *wanted to be born and to grow up in a human family*. In this way he consecrated the family as the first and ordinary means of his encounter with humanity.

In his life spent at Nazareth, Jesus honoured the Virgin Mary and the righteous Joseph, remaining under their authority throughout the period of his childhood and his adolescence (cf. Lk 2:41-52). In this way he shed light on the primary value of the family in the education of the person.

Jesus was introduced by Mary and Joseph into the religious community and frequented the synagogue of Nazareth. With them, he learned to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as the Gospel passage offered for our meditation by today's liturgy tells us.

When he was 12 years old, he stayed behind in the Temple and it took his parents all of three days to find him. With this act he made them understand that he "had to see to his Father's affairs", in other words, to the mission that God had entrusted to him (cf. Lk 2:41-52).

This Gospel episode reveals the most authentic and profound vocation of the family: that is, to accompany each of its members on the path of the discovery of God and of the plan that he has prepared for him or her.

Mary and Joseph taught Jesus primarily by their example: in his parents he came to know the full beauty of faith, of love for God and for his Law, as well as the demands of justice, which is totally fulfilled in love (cf. Rm 13:10).

From them he learned that it is necessary first of all to do God's will, and that the spiritual bond is worth more than the bond of kinship.

The Holy Family of Nazareth is truly the "prototype" of every Christian family which, united in the Sacrament of Marriage and nourished by the Word and the Eucharist, is called to carry out the wonderful vocation and mission of being the living cell not only of society but also of the Church, a sign and instrument of unity for the entire human race.

Let us now invoke for every family, especially families in difficulty, the protection of Mary Most Holy and of Saint Joseph. May they sustain such families so that they can resist the disintegrating forces of a certain contemporary culture which undermines the very foundations of the family institution.

May they help Christian families to be, in every part of the world, living images of God's love.

Benedict XVI
Angelus
31 December 2006

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OCTOBER

OCTOBER

That the Synod of Bishops may help the pastors and theologians, the catechists and promoters who are engaged in the service of the Word of God to courageously transmit the truth of faith in communion with the entire Church.

(...)

"Stand firm in your faith!" We have just heard the words of Jesus: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:15-17a). With these words Jesus reveals the profound link between faith and the profession of Divine Truth, between faith and dedication to Jesus Christ in love, between faith and the practice of a life inspired by the commandments. All three dimensions of faith are the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit. This action is manifested as an inner force that harmonizes the hearts of the disciples with the Heart of Christ and makes them capable of loving as he loved them. Hence faith is a gift, but at the same time it is a task.

"He will give you another Counsellor – the Spirit of truth." Faith, as knowledge and profession of the truth about God and about man, "comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ", as Saint Paul says (Rm 10:17). Throughout the history of the Church, the Apostles preached the word of Christ, taking care to hand it on intact to their successors, who in their turn transmitted it to subsequent generations until our own day. Many preachers of the Gospel gave their lives specifically because of their faithfulness to the truth of the word of Christ. And so solicitude for the truth gave birth to the Church's Tradition. As in past centuries, so

also today there are people or groups who obscure this centuries-old Tradition, seeking to falsify the Word of Christ and to remove from the Gospel those truths which in their view are too uncomfortable for modern man. They try to give the impression that everything is relative: even the truths of faith would depend on the historical situation and on human evaluation. Yet the Church cannot silence the Spirit of Truth. The successors of the Apostles, together with the Pope, are responsible for the truth of the Gospel, and all Christians are called to share in this responsibility, accepting its authoritative indications. Every Christian is bound to confront his own convictions continually with the teachings of the Gospel and of the Church's Tradition in the effort to remain faithful to the word of Christ, even when it is demanding and, humanly speaking, hard to understand. We must not yield to the temptation of relativism or of a subjectivist and selective interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Only the whole truth can open us to adherence to Christ, dead and risen for our salvation.

Christ says: "If you love me ..." Faith does not just mean accepting a certain number of abstract truths about the mysteries of God, of man, of life and death, of future realities. Faith consists in an intimate relationship with Christ, a relationship based on love of him who loved us first (cf. 1Jn 4:11), even to the total offering of himself. "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rm 5:8). What other response can we give to a love so great, if not that of a heart that is open and ready to love? But what does it mean to love Christ? It means trusting him even in times of trial, following him faithfully even on the *Via Crucis*, in the hope that soon the morning of the Resurrection will come. Entrusting ourselves to Christ, we lose nothing, we gain everything. In his hands our life acquires its true meaning. Love for Christ expresses itself in the will to harmonize our own life with the thoughts and sentiments of his Heart. This is achieved through interior union based on the grace of the Sacraments, strengthened by

continuous prayer, praise, thanksgiving and penance. We have to listen attentively to the inspirations that he evokes through his Word, through the people we meet, through the situations of daily life. To love him is to remain in dialogue with him, in order to know his will and to put it into effect promptly.

Yet living one's personal faith as a love-relationship with Christ also means being ready to renounce everything that constitutes a denial of his love. That is why Jesus said to the Apostles: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." But what are Christ's commandments? When the Lord Jesus was teaching the crowds, he did not fail to confirm the law which the Creator had inscribed on men's hearts and had then formulated on the tablets of the Decalogue. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Mt 5:17-18). But Jesus showed us with a new clarity the unifying centre of the divine laws revealed on Sinai, namely love of God and love of neighbour: "To love [God] with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk 12:33). Indeed, in his life and in his Paschal Mystery Jesus brought the entire law to completion. Uniting himself with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, he carries with us and in us the "yoke" of the law, which thereby becomes a "light burden" (Mt 11:30). In this spirit, Jesus formulated his list of the inner qualities of those who seek to live their faith deeply: Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who weep, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake ... (cf. Mt 5:3-12).

Dear brothers and sisters, faith as adherence to Christ is revealed as love that prompts us to promote the good inscribed by the Creator into the nature of every man and woman among us, into the personality of every other human being and into everything that exists in the world. Whoever believes and loves in this way becomes a builder of the true "civilization of love", of which Christ is the centre. Twenty-seven years ago, in this place, Pope John Paul II said: "Poland has become nowadays the land of a particularly responsible witness" (Warsaw, 2 June 1979). I ask you now, cultivate this rich heritage of faith transmitted to you by earlier generations, the heritage of the thought and the service of that great Pole who was Pope John Paul II. Stand firm in your faith, hand it down to your children, bear witness to the grace which you have experienced so abundantly through the Holy Spirit in the course of your history. May Mary, Queen of Poland, show you the way to her Son, and may she accompany you on your journey towards a happy, peace-filled future. May your hearts never be wanting in love for Christ and for his Church. Amen!

Benedict XVI
Pastoral visit in Poland
26 May 2006

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass of the Most Holy Virgin, at the time of the nativity (RM).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: The people that walked in darkness saw a great light:
Is 9:1-7.

Responsorial Psalm: Your word, Lord, is a light on my path: Ps
119:105-112.

Second reading: The new Jerusalem: Rv 21:1-5.

Gospel: Happy are those who hear the word of God and keep it: Lk
11:27-28.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What do you do to remain firm in your faith?
2. Which homilies do you most appreciate?
3. Do any of Jesus' words "keep you going"?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

Jesus Christ – the incarnate love of God

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

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That in this month dedicated to the missions, through the promotional activities of the Pontifical Missionary Works and other organisms, every Christian Community may feel the need to participate in the Church's universal mission with prayer, sacrifice and concrete help.

2. Every Christian community is therefore called to make known God who is Love. In my Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, I wanted to pause and reflect on this fundamental mystery of our faith. God imbues the entire creation and human history with his love.

In the beginning, man came from the Creator's hands as the fruit of an initiative of love. Later, sin obscured the impression of the divine within him.

Deceived by the Evil One, Adam and Eve, our first parents, failed to live up to the relationship of trust with their Lord, succumbing to the temptation of the Evil One who instilled in them the suspicion that the Lord was a rival and wanted to limit their freedom.

So it was that they preferred themselves to divine love freely given, convinced that in this way they were asserting their own free will. They consequently ended by losing their original happiness and they tasted the bitter sorrow of sin and death.

However, God did not abandon them. He promised salvation to them and to their descendents, announcing in advance that he would send his only-begotten Son, Jesus, who in the fullness of time was to reveal his love as Father, a love capable of redeeming every human creature from the slavery of evil and death.

In Christ, therefore, immortal life was communicated to us, the very life of the Trinity. Thanks to Christ, the Good Shepherd who did not abandon the lost sheep, human beings of all time were granted the possibility of entering into communion with God, the merciful Father who was prepared to welcome home the Prodigal Son.

An astonishing sign of this love is the Cross. Christ's death on the Cross, I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, is "the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him.... This is love in its most radical form.... It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move" (n. 12).

3. On the eve of his Passion, Jesus bequeathed as a testament to his disciples, who had gathered in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover, the "new commandment of love - *mandatum novum*": "This I command you, to love one another" (Jn 15:17). The brotherly love that the Lord asked of his "friends" originates in the fatherly love of God.

The Apostle John noted: "He who loves is born of God and knows God" (1Jn 4:7). Therefore, to love according to God it is necessary to live in him and of him: God is the first "home" of human beings, and only by dwelling in God do men and women burn with a flame of divine love that can set the world "on fire".

It is not difficult, then, to understand that authentic missionary concern, the priority commitment of the Ecclesial Community, is linked to faithfulness to divine love, and this is true for every individual Christian, for every local community, for the particular Churches and for the entire People of God. The generous

readiness of disciples of Christ to undertake works of human and spiritual advancement draws vigour literally from the awareness of this common mission. These works, as the beloved John Paul II wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, witness to "the soul of all missionary activity: love, which has been and remains the driving force of mission, and is also "the sole criterion for judging what is to be done or not done, changed or not changed. It is the principle which must direct every action, and the end to which that action must be directed. When we act with a view to charity, or are inspired by charity, nothing is unseemly and everything is good" (n. 60).

Consequently, being missionaries means loving God with all one's heart, even to the point, if necessary, of dying for him. How many priests, men and women Religious and lay people, have borne the supreme witness of love with martyrdom even in our times!

Being missionaries means stooping down to the needs of all, like the Good Samaritan, especially those of the poorest and most destitute people, because those who love with Christ's Heart do not seek their own interests but the glory of the Father and the good of their neighbour alone. Here lies the secret of the apostolic fruitfulness of missionary action that crosses frontiers and cultures, reaches peoples and spreads to the extreme boundaries of the world.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, may the World Missionary Day be a useful opportunity to understand ever better that the witness of love, the soul of the mission, concerns everyone. Indeed, serving the Gospel should not be considered a solitary adventure but a commitment to be shared by every community.

As well as those who are in the front line on the frontiers of evangelization - and I am thinking here with gratitude of the men and women missionaries - many others, children, young people and adults, with their prayers and cooperation, contribute in various

ways to spreading the Kingdom of God on earth. It is to be hoped that this participation will continue to grow, thanks to the contribution of one and all.

I willingly take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and to the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), which are dedicated to coordinating the efforts made in every part of the world to support the activity of those on the front lines on the missionary frontiers.

May the Virgin Mary, who collaborated actively in the beginning of the Church's mission with her presence beneath the Cross and her prayers in the Upper Room, sustain their action and help believers in Christ to be ever more capable of true love, so that they become sources of living water in a spiritually thirsting world. I wish this with all my heart, as I impart my Blessing to you all.

*Benedict XVI
Message for the 80th World Mission Sunday 2006
29 April 2006*

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NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER

That the testimony of love offered by the Saints may fortify Christians in their devotion to God and their neighbour, imitating Christ who came to serve and not to be served.

40. Finally, let us consider the saints, who exercised charity in an exemplary way. Our thoughts turn especially to Martin of Tours († 397), the soldier who became a monk and a bishop: he is almost like an icon, illustrating the irreplaceable value of the individual testimony to charity. At the gates of Amiens, Martin gave half of his cloak to a poor man: Jesus himself, that night, appeared to him in a dream wearing that cloak, confirming the permanent validity of the Gospel saying: "I was naked and you clothed me ... as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:36,40).

Yet in the history of the Church, how many other testimonies to charity could be quoted! In particular, the entire monastic movement, from its origins with Saint Anthony the Abbot († 356), expresses an immense service of charity towards neighbour. In his encounter "face to face" with the God who is Love, the monk senses the impelling need to transform his whole life into service of neighbour, in addition to service of God. This explains the great emphasis on hospitality, refuge and care of the infirm in the vicinity of the monasteries. It also explains the immense initiatives of human welfare and Christian formation, aimed above all at the very poor, who became the object of care firstly for the monastic and mendicant orders, and later for the various male and female religious institutes all through the history of the Church.

The figures of saints such as Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, Camillus of Lellis, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Giuseppe B. Cottolengo, John Bosco, Luigi Orione, Teresa

of Calcutta to name but a few-stand out as lasting models of social charity for all people of good will. The saints are the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love.

41. Outstanding among the saints is Mary, Mother of the Lord and mirror of all holiness. In the *Gospel of Luke* we find her engaged in a service of charity to her cousin Elizabeth, with whom she remained for "about three months" (1:56) so as to assist her in the final phase of her pregnancy. "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*", she says on the occasion of that visit, "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk 1:46). In these words she expresses her whole programme of life: not setting herself at the centre, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbour - only then does goodness enter the world.

Mary's greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly: her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:38,48). She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God's initiatives.

Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God's promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises. Mary is a woman of faith: "Blessed are you who believed", Elizabeth says to her (cf. Lk 1:45).

The *Magnificat* - a portrait, so to speak, of her soul - is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes

her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate.

Finally, Mary is a woman who loves. How could it be otherwise? As a believer who in faith thinks with God's thoughts and wills with God's will, she cannot fail to be a woman who loves. We sense this in her quiet gestures, as recounted by the infancy narratives in the Gospel. We see it in the delicacy with which she recognizes the need of the spouses at Cana and makes it known to Jesus. We see it in the humility with which she recedes into the background during Jesus' public life, knowing that the Son must establish a new family and that the Mother's hour will come only with the Cross, which will be Jesus' true hour (cf. Jn 2:4; 13:1). When the disciples flee, Mary will remain beneath the Cross (cf. Jn 19:25-27); later, at the hour of Pentecost, it will be they who gather around her as they wait for the Holy Spirit (cf. Ac 1:14).

42. The lives of the saints are not limited to their earthly biographies but also include their being and working in God after death. In the saints one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them.

In no one do we see this more clearly than in Mary. The words addressed by the crucified Lord to his disciple - to John and through him to all disciples of Jesus: "Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19:27) - are fulfilled anew in every generation. Mary has truly become the Mother of all believers. Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace, in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavours.

They constantly experience the gift of her goodness and the unfailing love which she pours out from the depths of her heart. The testimonials of gratitude, offered to her from every continent and culture, are a recognition of that pure love which is not self - seeking but simply benevolent. At the same time, the devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him - a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God's love to become in their turn a fountain from which "flow rivers of living water" (Jn 7:38). Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power.

To her we entrust the Church and her mission in the service of love:

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

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for all the Saints (RM, Mass for November 1st).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: I saw a huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language: Rv 7:2-4,9-14.

Responsorial Psalm: Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God: Ps 24 (23).

Second reading: We are truly the children of God: 1Jn 3:1-3.

Gospel: Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great!: Mt 5:1-12.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. In your opinion which Saints have been true witnesses of God's love? Can you name a few?
2. How can we imitate them?
3. How did Jesus bear witness to God's love?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

"The love of Christ urges us on" (2Co 5:14)

35. This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world - the Cross - and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own.

This duty is a grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: "We are useless servants" (Lk 17:10). We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so.

There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2Co 5:14).

36. When we consider the immensity of others' needs, we can, on the one hand, be driven towards an ideology that would aim at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem. Or we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path, without falling into an arrogant contempt for man, something not only unconstructive but actually destructive, or surrendering to a resignation which would prevent us from being guided by love in the service of others.

Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbours, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1996, Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: "We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer".

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That the Christian communities of Asia, contemplating the face of Christ, may know how to find the most suitable ways to announce Him, in full faithfulness to the Gospel, to the peoples of that vast continent so rich in culture and ancient forms of spirituality.

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. In these still early days of my Pontificate, I am glad to welcome you, *the Pastors of the Church in Sri Lanka*, on your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* - the first to take place since my election. I thank you for the gracious words addressed to me on your behalf by Bishop Joseph Vianney Fernando, President of your Episcopal Conference. You come from a Continent particularly marked by a wealth of cultures, languages and traditions (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 50) and you bear witness to the deep faith of your people in Jesus Christ, the sole Redeemer of the world. I pray that your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul may renew your commitment to serve and proclaim Christ with conviction, so that your people may grow in knowledge and love of him who came so that all "may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

2. Together with countless others throughout the world, I was deeply disturbed to observe the devastating effects of the tsunami last December, which claimed a vast number of lives in Sri Lanka alone, and left hundreds of thousands homeless. Please accept my profound sympathy and that of Catholics everywhere for all who have endured such terrible losses. In the faces of the bereaved and dispossessed, we cannot fail to recognize the suffering face of Christ, and indeed it is he whom we serve when we show our love and compassion to those in need (cf. Mt 25:40).

The Christian community has a particular obligation to care for those children who have lost their parents as a result of the natural disaster. To these most vulnerable members of society the Kingdom of heaven belongs (cf. Mt 19:14), yet so often they are simply forgotten or shamelessly exploited as soldiers, labourers, or innocent victims in the trafficking of human beings. No effort should be spared to urge civil authorities and the international community to fight these abuses and to offer young children the legal protection they justly deserve.

Even in the darkest moments of our lives, we know that God is never absent. Saint Paul reminds us that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rm 8:28), and this was manifested in the unprecedented generosity of the humanitarian response to the tsunami. I want to commend all of you for the outstanding way in which the Church in Sri Lanka struggled to meet the material, moral, psychological and spiritual needs of the victims. We can recognize further signs of God's goodness in the partnership and collaboration of so many diverse elements of society in the relief effort. It was heartening to see members of different religious and ethnic groups in Sri Lanka and throughout the global community coming together to show their solidarity towards the afflicted and rediscovering the fraternal bonds that unite them. I am confident that you will find ways of building further on the fruits of this cooperation, especially by ensuring that aid is offered freely to all who are in need.

(...)

4. To conclude my remarks with you today, I put before you the image of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, so recently invoked by my beloved predecessor to guide us in this Year of the Eucharist. Christ himself accompanied them on their journey. He opened their eyes to the truth contained in the Scriptures, he rekindled their hope and he revealed himself to them in the breaking

of the bread (cf. *Mane nobiscum Domine*, 1). He also accompanies you as you lead your people forward along the path of discipleship. Renew your trust in him! Open your hearts to him! Plead with him, in union with the whole Church throughout the world: "*Mane nobiscum, Domine*".

Entrusting you and your priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful to the intercession of Mary, Woman of the Eucharist, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and strength in her Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Benedict XVI
Address to the Bishops of Sri Lanka
on their "Ad Limina Apostolorum" visit
7 May 2005

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DECEMBER

DECEMBER

That, faced by the growing expansion of the culture of violence and death, the Church may courageously promote the culture of life through all her apostolic and missionary activities.

(...)

Yes, Baptism inserts us into communion with Christ and therefore gives life, life itself. We have thus interpreted the first dialogue we had with him here at the entrance to the Sistine Chapel.

Now, after the blessing of the water, a second dialogue of great importance will follow. This is its content: Baptism, as we have seen, is a gift; the gift of life. But a gift must be accepted, it must be lived.

A gift of friendship implies a "yes" to the friend and a "no" to all that is incompatible with this friendship, to all that is incompatible with the life of God's family, with true life in Christ.

Consequently, in this second dialogue, three "*noes*" and three "*yeses*" are spoken. We say "no" and renounce temptation, sin and the devil. We know these things well but perhaps, precisely because we have heard them too often, the words may not mean much to us.

If this is the case, we must think a little more deeply about the content of these "*noes*". What are we saying "no" to? This is the only way to understand what we want to say "yes" to. In the ancient Church these "*noes*" were summed up in a phrase that was easy to understand for the people of that time: they renounced, they said, the "*pompa diaboli*", that is, the promise of life in abundance, of that apparent life that seemed to come from the pagan world, from its permissiveness, from its way of living as one pleased.

It was therefore "no" to a culture of what seemed to be an abundance of life, to what in fact was an "*anticulture*" of death. It was "no" to those spectacles in which death, cruelty and violence had become an entertainment. Let us remember what was organized at the Colosseum or here, in Nero's gardens, where people were set on fire like living torches. Cruelty and violence had become a form of amusement, a true perversion of joy, of the true meaning of life.

This "*pompa diaboli*", this "anticulture" of death was a corruption of joy, it was love of deceit and fraud and the abuse of the body as a commodity and a trade.

And if we think about it now, we can say that also in our time we need to say "no" to the widely prevalent culture of death. It is an "anticulture" manifested, for example, in drugs, in the flight from reality to what is illusory, to a false happiness expressed in deceit, fraud, injustice and contempt for others, for solidarity, and for responsibility for the poor and the suffering; it is expressed in a sexuality that becomes sheer irresponsible enjoyment, that makes the human person into a "thing", so to speak, no longer considered a person who deserves personal love which requires fidelity, but who becomes a commodity, a mere object.

Let us say "no" to this promise of apparent happiness, to this "*pompa*" of what may seem to be life but is in fact merely an instrument of death, and to this "anticulture", in order to cultivate instead the culture of life. For this reason, the Christian "yes", from ancient times to our day, is a great "yes" to life. It is our "yes" to Christ, our "yes" to the Conqueror of death and the "yes" to life in time and in eternity.

Just as in this baptismal dialogue the "no" is expressed in three renunciations, so too the "yes" is expressed in three expressions of loyalty: "yes" to the living God, that is, a God Creator and a creating reason which gives meaning to the cosmos and to our

lives; "yes" to Christ, that is, to a God who did not stay hidden but has a name, words, a body and blood; to a concrete God who gives us life and shows us the path of life; "yes" to the communion of the Church, in which Christ is the living God who enters our time, enters our profession, enters daily life.

We might also say that the Face of God, the content of this culture of life, the content of our great "yes", is expressed in the Ten Commandments, which are not a pack of prohibitions, of "noes", but actually present a great vision of life.

They are a "yes" to a God who gives meaning to life (the first three Commandments); a "yes" to the family (Fourth Commandment); a "yes" to life (Fifth Commandment); a "yes" to responsible love (Sixth Commandment); a "yes" to solidarity, to social responsibility, to justice (Seventh Commandment); a "yes" to the truth (Eighth Commandment); a "yes" to respect for others and for their belongings (Ninth and 10th Commandments).

This is the philosophy of life, the culture of life that becomes concrete and practical and beautiful in communion with Christ, the living God, who walks with us in the companionship of his friends, in the great family of the Church. Baptism is a gift of life.

It is a "yes" to the challenge of really living life, of saying "no" to the attack of death that presents itself under the guise of life; and it is a "yes" to the great gift of true life that became present on the Face of Christ, who gives himself to us in Baptism and subsequently in the Eucharist.

I said this as a brief comment on the words in the baptismal dialogue that interpret what happens in this Sacrament. In addition to the words, we have gestures and symbols, but I will just point them out very briefly.

We have already made the first gesture: it is the Sign of the Cross, which is given to us as a shield that must protect this child in his life; and as an "indicator" that points out the way of life, for the Cross sums up Jesus' life.

Then, there are the elements: water, the anointing with oil, the white garment and the flame of the candle.

Water is the symbol of life: Baptism is new life in Christ. The oil is the symbol of strength, health and beauty, for it truly is beautiful to live in communion with Christ. Then, there is the white garment, as an expression of the culture of beauty, of the culture of life. And lastly, the flame of the candle is an expression of the truth that shines out in the darkness of history and points out to us who we are, where we come from and where we must go.

Dear Godparents, dear parents, dear brothers and sisters, let us thank the Lord today, for God does not hide behind clouds of impenetrable mystery but, as today's Gospel said, has opened the heavens, he has shown himself, he talks to us and is with us; he lives with us and guides us in our lives.

Let us thank the Lord for this gift and pray for our children, so that they may truly have life: authentic, eternal life. Amen.

*Benedict XVI
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
8 January 2006*

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LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass of the night of the Nativity (RM).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: The people who walked in darkness saw a great light: Is 9:1-6.

Responsorial Psalm: Sing to the Lord a new song: Ps 96 (95).

Second reading: God's saving grace has been revealed for all men: Tt 2:11-14.

Gospel: Today a Saviour was born for us: Lk 2:1-14.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. To what negative forces are we exposed in the world today?
2. What positive forces do we dispose of to resist them?
3. How did Jesus defeat evil through good?

PRAYER - MEDITATION

God is love

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

We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should ... have eternal life" (3:16). In acknowledging the centrality of love, Christian faith has retained the core of Israel's faith, while at the same time giving it new depth and breadth. The pious Jew prayed daily the words of the *Book of Deuteronomy* which expressed the heart of his existence: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:4-5). Jesus united into a single precept this commandment of love for God and the commandment of love for neighbour found in the *Book of Leviticus*: "You shall love your

neighbour as yourself" (19:18; cf. Mk 12:29-31). Since God has first loved us (cf. 1Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere "command"; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.

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

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus caritas est"
25 December 2005

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MISSION INTENTION

That, especially in mission Countries, Christians may show through gestures of brotherliness that the Child born in the grotto in Bethlehem is the luminous Hope of the world.

"Salvator noster natus est in mundo" (Roman Missal)

"Our Saviour is born to the world!" During the night, in our churches, we again heard this message that, notwithstanding the passage of the centuries, remains ever new. It is the heavenly message that tells us to fear not, for "a great joy" has come "to all the people" (Lk 1:10). It is a message of hope, for it tells us that, on that night over two thousand years ago, there "was born in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:11). The Angel of Christmas announced it then to the shepherds out on the hills of Bethlehem; today the Angel repeats it to us, to all who dwell in our world: "The Saviour is born; he is born for you! Come, come, let us adore him!".

But does a "Saviour" still have any value and meaning *for the men and women of the third millennium?* Is a "Saviour" still needed by a humanity which has reached the moon and Mars and is prepared to conquer the universe; for a humanity which knows no limits in its pursuit of nature's secrets and which has succeeded even in deciphering the marvellous codes of the human genome? Is a Saviour needed by a humanity which has invented interactive communication, which navigates in the virtual ocean of the internet and, thanks to the most advanced modern communications technologies, has now made the Earth, our great common home, a global village? This humanity of the twenty-first century appears as

a sure and self-sufficient master of its own destiny, the avid proponent of uncontested triumphs.

So it would seem, yet this is not the case. People continue to die of hunger and thirst, disease and poverty, in this age of plenty and of unbridled consumerism. Some people remain enslaved, exploited and stripped of their dignity; others are victims of racial and religious hatred, hampered by intolerance and discrimination, and by political interference and physical or moral coercion with regard to the free profession of their faith. Others see their own bodies and those of their dear ones, particularly their children, maimed by weaponry, by terrorism and by all sorts of violence, at a time when everyone invokes and acclaims progress, solidarity and peace for all. And what of those who, bereft of hope, are forced to leave their homes and countries in order to find humane living conditions elsewhere? How can we help those who are misled by facile prophets of happiness, those who struggle with relationships and are incapable of accepting responsibility for their present and future, those who are trapped in the tunnel of loneliness and who often end up enslaved to alcohol or drugs? What are we to think of those who choose death in the belief that they are celebrating life?

How can we not hear, from the very depths of this humanity, at once joyful and anguished, a heart-rending cry for help? It is Christmas: today "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9) came into the world. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14), proclaims the Evangelist John. Today, this very day, Christ comes once more "unto his own", and to those who receive him he gives "the power to become children of God"; in a word, he offers them the opportunity to see God's glory and to share the joy of that Love which became incarnate for us in Bethlehem. Today "our Saviour is born to the world", for he knows that even today we need him. Despite humanity's many advances, man has always been the

same: *a freedom poised between good and evil, between life and death*. It is there, in the very depths of his being, in what the Bible calls his "heart", that man *always* needs to be "saved". And, in this post-modern age, perhaps he needs a Saviour all the more, since the society in which he lives has become more complex and the threats to his personal and moral integrity have become more insidious. Who can defend him, if not the One who loves him to the point of sacrificing on the Cross his only-begotten Son as the Saviour of the world?"

Salvator noster": Christ is also the Saviour of men and women today. Who will make this message of hope resound, in a credible way, in every corner of the earth? Who will work to ensure the recognition, protection and promotion of the integral good of the human person as the condition for peace, respecting each man and every woman and their proper dignity? Who will help us to realize that with good will, reasonableness and moderation it is possible to avoid aggravating conflicts and instead to find fair solutions? With deep apprehension I think, on this festive day, of the Middle East, marked by so many grave crises and conflicts, and I express my hope that the way will be opened to a just and lasting peace, with respect for the inalienable rights of the peoples living there. I place in the hands of the divine Child of Bethlehem the indications of a resumption of dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians, which we have witnessed in recent days, and the hope of further encouraging developments. I am confident that, after so many victims, destruction and uncertainty, a democratic Lebanon, open to others and in dialogue with different cultures and religions, will survive and progress. I appeal to all those who hold in their hands the fate of Iraq, that there will be an end to the brutal violence that has brought so much bloodshed to the country, and that every one of its inhabitants will be safe to lead a normal life. I pray to God that in Sri Lanka the parties in conflict will heed the desire of the people for a future of brotherhood and solidarity; that in Darfur and throughout

Africa there will be an end to fratricidal conflicts, that the open wounds in that continent will quickly heal and that the steps being made towards reconciliation, democracy and development will be consolidated. May the Divine Child, the Prince of Peace, grant an end to the outbreaks of tension that make uncertain the future of other parts of the world, in Europe and in Latin America.

"*Salvator noster*": this is our hope; this is the message that the Church proclaims once again this Christmas day. With the Incarnation, as the Second Vatican Council stated, the Son of God has in some way united himself with each man and women (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). The birth of the Head is also the birth of the body, as Pope Saint Leo the Great noted. In Bethlehem the Christian people was born, Christ's mystical body, in which each member is closely joined to the others in total solidarity. *Our Saviour is born for all*. We must proclaim this not only in words, but by our entire life, giving the world a witness of united, open communities where fraternity and forgiveness reign, along with acceptance and mutual service, truth, justice and love.

A community saved by Christ. This is the true nature of the Church, which draws her nourishment from his Word and his Eucharistic Body. Only by rediscovering the gift she has received can the Church bear witness to Christ the Saviour before all people. She does this with passionate enthusiasm, with full respect for all cultural and religious traditions; she does so joyfully, knowing that the One she proclaims *takes away nothing that is authentically human*, but instead brings it to fulfilment. In truth, Christ comes to destroy only evil, only sin; everything else, all the rest, he elevates and perfects. Christ does not save us *from* our humanity, but *through* it; he does not save us *from* the world, but came *into* the world, so that through him the world might be saved (cf. Jn 3:17).

Dear brothers and sisters, wherever you may be, may this message of joy and hope reach your ears: *God became man in Jesus Christ*, he was born of the Virgin Mary and today he is reborn in the Church. He brings to all the love of the Father in heaven. *He is the Saviour of the world!* Do not be afraid, open your hearts to him and receive him, so that his Kingdom of love and peace may become the common legacy of each man and woman. Happy Christmas!

*Benedict XVI
Urbi et Orbi Message
Christmas 2006*

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