

PRAYING WITH THE CHURCH 2009

Special edition to PRAYER AND SERVICE

July - September 2008

N. 3

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GENERAL OFFICE OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER
BORGIO S. SPIRITO, 4 - CP 6139 - 00195 ROME - PRATI (ITALY)

PRESENTATION

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

Dear friends,

Once again we have been entrusted by the Holy Father to circulate his prayer intentions. We consider it a privilege that for almost 120 years, since 1890, the Pope has confided in the Apostleship of Prayer to keep the entire world informed of his concerns, which he recommends to the prayer of all Christians.

Each one of us wishes to take up this invitation and privilege, thus uniting our prayer and our lives to the prayer and mission of the universal Church.

In this special issue of Prayer & Service we will find, as in previous years, a selection of teaching texts, almost all by Pope Benedict XVI, which comment on the theme of the intention for each month, followed by a section with liturgical suggestions for a community celebration centred around these intentions. There is a new section this year - a brief "pastoral comment" - intended to give additional information which can be of help to those who explain the intentions. Then questions for reflection are suggested for a further personal or group in-depth study of the theme of the general intention. We have eliminated a section which appeared each month in past years called "Prayer - Meditation".

In order to go further in-depth into some of the general intentions, besides the teaching text given we sometimes suggest other documents on the same theme. These can easily be found on the internet portal of the Holy See, www.vatican.va. To find these texts and other connected ones rapidly we recommend the search engine this portal offers in various languages. This is indicated in

the front-page of the site, but it can be reached directly by inserting <http://vatican.mondosearch.com/search.aspx>

I am using the publication of this issue to announce the GOOD NEWS, for those who have not yet heard it, that the web page of our international office in Rome has been launched. We invite you to visit it at www.apostleshipofprayer.net. Through it we will establish a new system of information and communication with each one of you. In it you will find definitions, support material, contacts, good ideas, news, and other useful means for the development of our mission. We would appreciate your suggestions for improving it.

I encourage you to continue to untiringly spread the Holy Father's intentions through every means at your disposal. I am witnessing the fine initiatives for the diffusion of the Holy Father's concerns in various parts of the world, whether through the radio, internet, reviews, pamphlets, leaflets, as well as through television. The comment on each intention is a good occasion to study in-depth a theme of ecclesial and social importance in a world context. Let us not waste it!

I wish you well in your work.

United in the Heart of Jesus,

Claudio Barriga, S.J.
Delegate Director General

JANUARY

JANUARY

That the family may become more and more a place of training in charity, personal growth and transmission of the faith.

The Second Vatican Council dedicated much attention to the family. Married partners, it said, must be witnesses of faith to each other and to their children (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 35). The Christian family thus shares in the Church's prophetic vocation: with its way of living, it "proclaims aloud both the present power of the Kingdom of God and the hope of the blessed life" (ibid.).

Then, as my venerable Predecessor John Paul II tirelessly repeated, the good of the person and of society is closely connected to the "healthy state" of the family (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 47). The Church, therefore, is committed to defending and to fostering "the dignity and supremely sacred value of the married state" (ibid.).

[...]

I likewise encourage them, drawing inspiration from Christ's love for humanity, to bear witness to the world of the beauty of human love, marriage and the family. Founded on the indissoluble union between a man and a woman, the family constitutes the privileged context in which human life is welcomed and protected from its beginning to its natural end. Thus, parents have the right and the fundamental obligation to raise their children in the faith and values which give dignity to human life.

It is worthwhile working for the family and marriage because it is worthwhile working for the human being, God's most precious creature. I have a special word for children, so that they may love and pray for their fathers and mothers and their siblings; to young people, so that encouraged by their parents' love, they

may follow generously their own vocation to marriage, priestly or religious life; to the elderly and the sick, so that they may find needed help and understanding. And you, dear spouses, may you always count on God's grace so that your love may be increasingly fruitful and faithful every day. I entrust the outcome of this celebration to the hands of Mary, who "with her "yes" opened the door of our world to God" (*Spe Salvi*, n. 49). Many thanks and happy holidays!

Benedict XVI
Angelus, 30 December 2007

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40. [...] The family is the basic cell of society. It is the cradle of life and love, the place in which the individual "is born" and "grows". Therefore a primary concern is reserved for this community, especially, in these times when human egoism, the anti-birth campaign, totalitarian politics, situations of poverty, material, cultural and moral misery, threaten to make these very springs of life dry up. Furthermore, ideologies and various systems, together with forms of uninterest and indifference, dare to take over the role in education proper to the family.

Required in the face of this is a vast, extensive and systematic work, sustained not only by culture but also by economic and legislative means, which will safeguard the role of family in its task of being the primary place of "humanization" for the person and society.

It is above all the lay faithful's duty in the apostolate to make the family aware of its identity as the primary social nucleus,

and its basic role in society, so that it might itself become always a more active and responsible place for proper growth and proper participation in social life. In such a way the family can and must require from all, beginning with public authority, the respect for those rights which in saving the family, will save society itself. [...]

As experience testifies, whole civilizations and the cohesiveness of peoples depend above all on the human quality of their families. For this reason the duty in the apostolate towards the family acquires an incomparable social value. The Church, for her part, is deeply convinced of it, knowing well that "the path to the future passes through the family".

John Paul II
Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles Laici"
30 December 1988

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

A priest commented: "I grew up with the Apostleship of Prayer". He found in his family a school of prayer and training in faith which, much later, gave him the basis for his priestly vocation. The Pope's intention for this month wishes to remind us that parents are their children's first teachers of the faith. This function must not be simply handed over to the school or the parish. We know that what is not learned in the first years of life in the affection and warmth of the home can never be replaced. Parents have the privilege (as well as the obligation) to take care of and guide the growth of the faith their children have received as a seed on the day they took them to be baptized. The Christian

education of children is certainly a great challenge in the secularized surroundings lived in many of our countries. However it undoubtedly is the most noble duty of parenthood and the cornerstone of the training parents must transmit. They must teach their children to pray, living the fact that "the family who prays together stays together". The religious dimension will give tomorrow's adults the right hierarchy of values and the certainty of knowing that God loves them. In environments in which Christian life is threatened and questioned, the "training in charity, personal growth and the transmission of the faith" at home will provide the basis for the healthy development of people able to contribute to the good of society.

LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (RM, Time of the Nativity).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: He who fears the Lord loves his father and mother: Si 3:3-14.

Responsorial Psalm: Blessing of the family that fears the Lord: Ps 128 (127).

Second reading: The life of the Christian family: Col 3:12-21.

Gospel: The child grew full of wisdom: Lk 2:22-52.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What memories do I have of the Christian training I received in my own home?
2. What practices can help today's families educate their children in the faith?
3. What role can the Apostleship of Prayer play in this education in the faith within families?

MISSION INTENTION

That the different Christian confessions, aware of the need for a new evangelization in this period of profound transformations, may be committed to announcing the Good News and moving towards the full unity of all Christians in order to offer a more credible testimony of the Gospel.

Indeed, it is not we who act or who organize the unity of the Church. The Church does not make herself or live of herself, but from the creative Word that comes from the mouth of God. To listen to the word of God together; to practise the *lectio divina* of the Bible, that is, reading linked with prayer; letting ourselves be amazed by the newness of the Word of God that never ages and is

never depleted; overcoming our deafness to those words that do not correspond with our prejudices and our opinions; to listen and also to study, in the communion of believers of all ages; all these things constitute a path to be taken in order to achieve unity in the faith as a response to listening to the Word.

Anyone who listens to the Word of God can and must speak and transmit it to others, to those who have never heard it, or who have forgotten it and buried under the thorny troubles and deceptions of the world (cf. Mt 13:22). We must ask ourselves: have not we Christians become perhaps too silent? Do we not perhaps lack the courage to speak out and witness as did those who witnessed the healing of the deaf-mute in the Decapolis? Our world needs this witness; above all, it is waiting for the common testimony of Christians.

Therefore listening to the God who speaks also implies a reciprocal listening, the dialogue between the Churches and the Ecclesial Communities. Honest and loyal dialogue is the typical and indispensable instrument in the quest for unity.

The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council emphasized that if Christians do not know each other reciprocally, progress on the path of communion is unthinkable. Indeed, in dialogue we listen and communicate; we confront one another and, with God's grace, it is possible to converge on his Word, accepting its demands that apply to all.

The Council Fathers did not expect listening and dialogue to be helpful for ecumenical progress alone, but they added a perspective which refers to the Catholic Church herself: "From such dialogue" the conciliar text states, "will emerge still more clearly what the situation of the Catholic Church really is" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 9).

It is indispensable "that the doctrine be clearly presented in its entirety" for a dialogue that confronts, discusses and overcomes the divergences that still exist among Christians, but of course, "the manner and order in which Catholic belief is expressed should in no way become an obstacle to dialogue with our brethren" (ibid., n. 11). It is necessary to speak correctly (*orthos*) and in a comprehensible way. The ecumenical dialogue entails evangelical fraternal correction and leads to a reciprocal spiritual enrichment in the sharing of authentic experiences of faith and Christian life.

Benedict XVI
Liturgy of Vespers on the feast of the conversion of
Saint Paul for the conclusion of prayer for Christian Unity
25 January 2007

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See also www.vatican.va:
Homily of his Holiness Benedict XVI - Liturgy of Vespers on the feast of the conversion of Saint Paul for the conclusion of prayer for Christian Unity, 25 January 2008.

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

Among the 2.140 million Christians of various confessions -more or less one third of the world population - there are 56 Churches and 175 institutions. We can class the Christian Churches in basically two large groups. On the one hand the Latin Church, which developed in what was the western part of the Roman empire, principally with the Catholic Church united around the Pope and the later Protestant Churches. The second group is that

formed by the Orthodox Churches born in the Greek language in the eastern part of the empire; they are autonomous among themselves without any one having the primacy, as occurred in the West. Among them, the Russian Orthodox Church has the greatest number of members. There are many points of union among these different groups but also profound doctrinal differences and they are far from attaining full communion.

Important steps have been taken in the slow road to ecumenism begun in 1908 by the Episcopalian minister (Anglican in USA) Paul Watson. Among other points, the recent agreement between the Joint Theological Commission and the Lutheran Church on the question of salvation through faith alone, and the mutual recognition of the validity of baptism administered by different Christian confessions in some local Churches, stands out. The recent meetings between great religious world leaders has helped to create a new awareness (see also the Pastoral Comment on the Missionary Intention for November in this issue). One frequently meets the best examples of concrete ecumenism in the practice which de facto is lived in popular sectors of many parts of the world among neighbours who share their religious celebrations. Although there are encouraging signs around us, we know that there still is a long way to go, and we continue to ask insistently for the gift of unity desired by Jesus (cf. Jn 17:21).

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY

That the Pastors of the Church may always be docile to the action of the Holy Spirit in their teaching and in their service to God's people.

11. [...] Objective sanctification, which by Christ's work is present in the sacrament through the communication of the Holy Spirit, needs to coincide with subjective sanctification, in which the Bishop, by the help of grace, must continuously progress through the exercise of his ministry. [...] This requires of the Bishop an attitude of service marked by personal strength, apostolic courage and trusting abandonment to the inner working of the Spirit. He will therefore strive to adopt a lifestyle which imitates the kenosis of Christ, the poor and humble servant, so that the exercise of his pastoral ministry will be a consistent reflection of Jesus, the Servant of God, and will help him to become, like Jesus, close to everyone, from the greatest to the least. Again, by a form of reciprocal interplay, the faithful and loving exercise of his ministry sanctifies the Bishop and on the subjective level configures him ever more closely to the ontological richness of sanctity which the sacrament has bestowed upon him. [...]

13. A Bishop can be considered a genuine minister of communion and hope for God's holy people only when he walks in the presence of the Lord. It is not possible to be a servant of others unless one is first a "servant of God". And one can only be a servant of God if one is a "man of God". For this reason I stated in my homily at the beginning of the Synod: "The pastor must be a man of God; his existence and his ministry are entirely under his divine glory and from the supereminent mystery of God they derive their light and vigour".

For Bishops the call to holiness is inherent in the

sacramental event that stands at the origin of their ministry, that is, their episcopal ordination. The ancient Euchology of Serapion formulates the ritual invocation of the consecration thus: "God of truth, make thy servant a living Bishop, a holy Bishop in the succession of the holy Apostles". Since episcopal ordination does not infuse the perfection of the virtues, "the Bishop is called to pursue his path of perfection with greater intensity so as to attain to the stature of Christ, the perfect Man". [...]

The Synod Fathers presented in synthesis some of the demands of this journey. Above all they stressed the character given in Baptism and Confirmation, which from the beginning of our lives as Christians, through the theological virtues, makes us capable of believing in God, hoping in him and loving him. The Holy Spirit, in turn, infuses his gifts and fosters our growth in goodness through the exercise of the moral virtues that concretize, also on the human level, our spiritual life. By means of the Baptism he has received, the Bishop shares, like every Christian, in that spirituality which is rooted in incorporation in Christ and is manifested in following Christ in accordance with the Gospel. For this reason the Bishop shares the call to holiness proper to all the faithful. He must therefore cultivate a life of prayer and profound faith, and put all his trust in God, offering his witness to the Gospel in docile obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and maintaining a particular filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the perfect teacher of the spiritual life.

The spirituality of the Bishop will thus be a spirituality of communion, lived in harmony with the other baptized faithful who with him are children of one Father in heaven and one Mother on earth, Holy Church. Like all believers in Christ, he needs to nourish his spiritual life with the living and effective word of the Gospel and with the living bread of the Holy Eucharist, the food of eternal life. Because of his human frailty the Bishop is also called to have frequent and regular recourse to the sacrament of Penance,

in order to obtain the gift of that mercy of which he himself has been made a minister. Mindful, therefore, of his human weaknesses and sins, each Bishop, along with his priests, personally experiences the sacrament of Reconciliation as a profound need and as a grace to be received ever anew, and thus renews his own commitment to holiness in the exercise of his ministry. In this way he also gives visible expression to the mystery of a Church which is constitutively holy, yet also made up of sinners in need of forgiveness. [...] Hence, the Bishop constantly needs the grace of God that strengthens and perfects his human nature.

73. [...] Where then will we Bishops get the "bread" needed to respond to the many requests which come to us from within and without the Churches and the Church? We could easily complain, as the Apostles did to Jesus: "Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" (Mt 15:33). Where can we find the resources we need? We can at least point to a few fundamental answers.

Our first, transcendent resource is the love of God poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (cf. Rm 5:5). The love with which God has loved us is so great that it can always sustain us in finding the right ways to touch the hearts of men and women today. At every moment the Lord gives us, by the power of his Spirit, an ability to love and to find the best and most beautiful ways to express that love. We are called to be servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world, yet we know that this hope does not come from us, but from the Holy Spirit, who "does not cease to be the guardian of hope in the human heart: the hope of all human creatures, and especially of those who "have the first fruits of the Spirit" and "wait for the redemption of their bodies".

John Paul II
Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Pastores Gregis"

16 October 2003

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

The healthy obedience of the Christian faithful to their bishops is a fundamental part of the unity and communion of the Church, and it must always be borne in mind and strengthened. But in this intention the Holy Father asks us to pray that an earlier and very important obedience be accomplished.

He is not speaking here of the obedience of the faithful to their bishop, but of the obedience of the bishops to the Holy Spirit. This prayer reminds us that they too are the People of God, who must also seek and discern the voice of God which must guide them. In their condition of human beings, sinners like us all, "since the episcopal Ordination does not instill the perfection of virtues", they must seek each day the Lord's will and ask for the strength to accomplish it.

The Holy Father asks us to pray that they may receive the light of the Spirit in front of their challenging pastoral mission and may "attain the stature of Christ, the perfect man". Our pastors will hear God's voice in their personal prayer, in the Word, in liturgical celebration, in their people, in the poor, in the events of History, and in simple every-day things.

With sincere love and filial affection, let us ask that they be obedient to this voice in their pastoral task.

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for the ministers of the Church (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening: 1S 3:1-10.

Responsorial Psalm: The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing: Ps 22.

Second reading: Living and walking in the Spirit: Ga 5:16-25.

Gospel: Jesus teaches the disciples to pray: Mt 6:9-13.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Why is it important to pray for our pastors? Do we do so?
2. Am I able to recognize the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the voice of the bishops and, therefore, obey their teachings? What do I do when I find this difficult?

3. What do we answer to someone who says "I believe in God, but not in the priests"?

MISSION INTENTION

That the Church in Africa may find adequate ways and means to promote reconciliation, justice and peace efficaciously, according to the indications of the Synod of the Bishops' II Special Assembly for Africa.

4. The two assemblies have in common an urgent need, at an historic moment, of an on-going, in-depth evangelization. Furthermore, in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, a commitment to reconciliation, justice and peace appears to be where this Kingdom of Love is to be realized: "...the Kingdom of God... means righteousness and peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit" (Rm 14:17ff). In Africa's current historical, social, political, cultural and religious circumstances, the Church-Family of God draws her energy from Christ, the ever-living Word of God, so that she can overcome weariness and thoughts of surrender and free herself from all forms of oppression. In fact, Christ invites her to bear the yoke of his love and find refreshment in him for a new life, and to receive the enthusiasm and light to dispel the many dark clouds which hang over the peoples of Africa in these times. [...]

30. Who will support the drastic changes in conduct which must come about to change Africa's destiny, so that reconciliation will come in the midst of so much hatred and divisions, and peace and justice will finally reign in Africa? What is the work of imagination in plotting the path into the future? How should the Gospel be proclaimed in an Africa marked by hatred, wars and injustices? How can we tackle the negative aspects of globalization? In brief, how can the Church remain faithful to the Lord's command and contribute to the promotion of reconciliation,

peace and justice? Before these challenges, the Church-Family of God in Africa has no other response than that of Simon Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). These questions are an invitation to the Church to start afresh from Christ, the Fullness of Life, our Reconciler, our Peace and our Justice. Christ is our "Hope" (cf. 1Tm 1:1); "For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actually destroying in his own person the hostility" (Ep 2:14). The whole Church is invited to ponder these truths of the faith, their significance and, above all, their consequences for her mission, that is, the proclamation of the Gospel which is Jesus Christ, the Source of Life's Fullness.

31. There is no easy answer to the above questions. However, the Church-Family of God in Africa holds that the only solution is one Person: Jesus Christ! This is why she invites her members to continue to hope in him, the only one capable of restoring Africa's dignity and true freedom. By again centring her thoughts and deeds on Christ, by making him known and loved, and by embarking on following Christ through the experience of a personal and communal encounter with him, the Church-Family of God in Africa will allow the light of her Trinitarian life to shine. In this way, African history and societies will be transformed in Christ, through him, with him and for him. Through this encounter with the living God in Jesus Christ, Africa will find the much-aspired fullness of life.

37. Having been envisioned as a Church-Family, the Church in Africa aims at reminding everyone that they are sisters and brothers (cf. Mt 23:8), and that they all have the duty to seek in all things what contributes to building fellowship, peace (cf. Rm 14:19) and justice. In God's plan, the Church is not a means which can be used for any ideology whatsoever. On the contrary, in the mystery of the communication of God's love to humanity, she is

the sign and instrument of the communion of the human family with God himself, communion among men and communion with the whole of creation. She bears in her bosom the Word and the Bread of Life, the Word and Bread of Love.

III. Towards a Spirituality of Commitment in the World

88. When the Fathers of the Church speak about the priestly ministry of faithful believers, they mean the Christian life as worship, that is, a life consisting of a total orientation of one's being to God and neighbour. Sometimes, this can entail the supreme offering of one's life in martyrdom. In summarizing the patristic tradition, Saint Thomas Aquinas states that the sacramental character received in Baptism and Confirmation is to be seen as a sharing in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and the ability to offer worship. The idea of worship is to be understood as "worship through a Christian life". For Saint Thomas, worship is not a question of exterior ritual or structures but of leading a truly Christian life. Above all, every Christian is called to bear witness not so much in what he says and does as in what he is and how he lives, namely, based on his relationship to Christ which, in turn, determines what is said and done. The words and deeds of the Christian must be an expression of gratitude to the Father, who, in Jesus Christ, is the source of everything that is good.

89. [...] This sharing in God's creative power requires a Christian to be conscientious in carrying out his individual tasks, that is, love must sanctify his tasks, even to the smallest detail. [...] The sanctification of everyday work is for the Christian the cardinal point, so to speak, of a true spirituality in the temporal order.

*Synod of Bishops
Lineamenta for the II Special Assembly for Africa
The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace
27 June 2006*

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PASTORAL COMMENT

"From April 10 to May 8 1994, the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was held on the topic: "The Church in Africa and her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: "You shall be my witnesses (Ac 1:8)". The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, signed by Pope John Paul II, [...] has since guided the pastoral activity of the Catholic Church in Africa.

[...]

He announced on 13 November 2004 his intention to convoke a Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI confirmed his predecessor's plan by announcing on 22 June 2005, in the presence of the Special Council for Africa of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, his decision to convoke in Rome the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

In collaboration with the above-mentioned Council, His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI specified the topic of the synodal meeting: "The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: "You Are the Salt of the Earth... You Are the Light of the World" (Mt 5:13,14)". [...]

Thanks be to God, during these past years, the Catholic Church, the Family of God in pilgrimage in Africa, has witnessed considerable growth throughout the continent, especially in the number of Faithful. According to the 2004 statistics, the Faithful

now total 148,817,000, with 630 bishops and 31,259 priests, of whom 20,358 are diocesan and 10,901 religious. Moreover, there are 7,791 lay brothers, 57,475 consecrated women and 379,656 catechists. Missionaries from Africa working in the pastoral programs of other particular Churches in Africa or on other continents are remarkably on the rise. The Church's educational and charitable aid activities have been decisive in many countries affected by different emergency situations".

Synod of Bishops
Preface - Lineamenta for the II Special Assembly for Africa
The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace
27 June 2006

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See the complete document at www.vatican.va

MARCH

MARCH

That the role of women may be more appreciated and used to good advantage in every country in the world.

It is a true pleasure to welcome and greet all of you taking part at the international convention on the theme: "Woman and Man, the Human in Its Entirety", organized on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*.

[...]

Opening the work of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences in May of last year in Brazil, I was able to recall how a masculine mentality still persists that ignores the novelty of Christianity, which recognizes and proclaims that men and women share equal dignity and responsibility. There are places and cultures where women are discriminated against or undervalued for the sole fact of being women, where recourse is made even to religious arguments and family, social and cultural pressure in order to maintain the inequality of the sexes, where acts of violence are consummated in regard to women, making them the object of mistreatment and of exploitation in advertising and in the consumer and entertainment industry. Faced with such grave and persistent phenomena the Christian commitment appears all the more urgent so that everywhere it may promote a culture that recognizes the dignity that belongs to women, in law and in concrete reality.

[...]

The State, for its part, must uphold with appropriate social policies everything that promotes the stability and unity of matrimony, the dignity and responsibility of couples, their rights

and irreplaceable duty as educators of their children. Besides, it is necessary to enable the woman to collaborate in the building of society, appreciating her typical "feminine genius".

[...]

Benedict XVI
To the participants in the International Convention
on the theme "woman and man, the human in its entirety"
9 February 2008

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* * *

5. [...] There should be no doubt that on the basis of their equal dignity with men "women have a full right to become actively involved in all areas of public life, and this right must be affirmed and guaranteed, also, where necessary, through appropriate legislation" (Ibid.). In truth, in some societies, women have made great strides in this direction, being involved in a more decisive way, not without overcoming many obstacles, in cultural, social, economic and political life (cf. Ibid.). This is a positive and hopeful development which the Beijing Conference can help to consolidate, in particular by calling on all countries to overcome situations which prevent women from being acknowledged, respected and appreciated in their dignity and competence.

Profound changes are needed in the attitudes and organization of society in order to facilitate the participation of women in public life, while at the same time providing for the special obligations of women and of men with regard to their families. In some cases changes have also to be made to render it

possible for women to have access to property and to the management of their assets. Nor should the special difficulties and problems faced by single women living alone or those who head families be neglected.

6. In fact, development and progress imply access to resources and opportunities, equitable access not only between the least developed, developing and richer countries, and between social and economic classes, but also between women and men (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 9). Greater efforts are needed to eliminate discrimination against women in areas that include education, health care and employment. Where certain groups or classes are systematically excluded from these goods, and where communities or countries lack basic social infrastructures and economic opportunities, women and children are the first to experience marginalization. And yet, where poverty abounds, or in the face of the devastation of conflict and war, or the tragedy of migration, forced or otherwise, it is very often women who maintain the vestiges of human dignity, defend the family, and preserve cultural and religious values.

History is written almost exclusively as the narrative of men's achievements, when in fact its better part is most often moulded by women's determined and persevering action for good. Elsewhere I have written about man's debt to woman in the realm of life and the defence of life (cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18). How much still needs to be said and written about man's enormous debt to woman in every other realm of social and cultural progress! The Church and human society have been, and continue to be, measurelessly enriched by the unique presence and gifts of women, especially those who have consecrated themselves to the Lord and in him have given themselves in service to others.

8. The challenge facing most societies is that of upholding, indeed strengthening, woman's role in the family while at the same

time making it possible for her to use all her talents and exercise all her rights in building up society. However, women's greater presence in the work force, in public life, and generally in the decision making processes guiding society, on an equal basis with men, will continue to be problematic as long as the costs continue to burden the private sector. In this area the State has a duty of subsidiarity, to be exercised through suitable legislative and social security initiatives. In the perspective of uncontrolled free-market policies there is little hope that women will be able to overcome the obstacles on their path.

John Paul II
Letter to Mrs. Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General
of the Fourth World Conference on women of the United Nations
26 May 1995

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See also www.vatican.va:

- *Mulieris dignitatem*, John Paul II, 15 August 1988.

- INTERVENTION BY THE HOLY SEE AT THE 61st SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS ON THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, ADDRESS OF H.E. MSGR. CELESTINO MIGLIORE, New York, 8 March 2007.

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

In November 2007 the court of Qatif, in Saudi Arabia, condemned a young girl of 19 who had been repeatedly raped by seven men to 200 lashes and six months of prison. Her crime was to be with a man who was not a relative in a car. This case, which caused indignation in the world, is one more example of the unjust situation many women have to bear in many countries, in every continent. Every day there are millions of victims of physical and sexual violence, often in their own homes, with limited possibility of having recourse to justice.

Gender discrimination is generally the cause of girls having less possibility of going to school. Actually 2/3 of the illiterate people in the world are women. It is a known fact that their level of instruction is directly related to their life expectancy and progress. In their situation of poverty (3/5 of the poor are women), many find themselves driven to prostitution, which insults them and exposes them to the risk of serious violence and infirmities. And the situation of millions of girls captured and traded as slaves (in some cases sold by their own parents) for sexual or other services is even more dramatic. In many societies the practice of girl infanticide is widespread with preference given to males or else selective abortion to eliminate female foetuses.

Another ambit of discrimination is that of the difference in salaries. Studies by international organs indicate that in the Middle East and North Africa women earn only 30% of what men earn for the same work. In Latin America and Southern Asia this becomes 40%, in sub-Saharan Africa 50%, in central-eastern Europe and other industrialized countries 60%. This reveals the disrespect for women's work and for the roles associated with maternity. Yet another source of degradation for women is the pornographic

industry which every years turns over 60 thousand million dollars. Information from the United States indicates that 40% of internet users accede to pornographic sites at least once a month, a figure which rises to 70% among males from 18 to 34 years old.

Let us pray this month that, starting from our own homes, the nations may appreciate and attach value to women through concrete gestures: initiatives intended to guarantee them access to education, the financing of state programs which give greater value to the role of women, adequate legislation and the promotion of their participation in political life, among other things.

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Votive Mass of Mary, Mother of the Church (RM, Votive Masses).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: Mary the seat of wisdom: Pr 4:7-13.

Responsorial Psalm: The Lord announces peace to his people: Ps 84.

Second reading: The Lord sent his Son, born of woman Ga 4:4-7.

Gospel: This is your Mother Jn 19:25-27.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Where and in what situations do we see discrimination against women in our country and in our society?
2. In what situations do our own women take on mannish attitudes (with their sons, daughters or themselves)?
3. What initiatives can we take in our area or community to help see that the dignity of women is always respected?

MISSION INTENTION

That, in the light of the letter addressed to them by Pope Benedict XVI, the Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the Popular Republic of China may commit themselves to being the sign and instrument of unity, communion and peace.

4. As universal Pastor of the Church, I wish to manifest sincere gratitude to the Lord for the deeply-felt witness of faithfulness offered by the Chinese Catholic community in truly difficult circumstances. At the same time, I sense the urgent need, as my deep and compelling duty and as an expression of my paternal love, to confirm the faith of Chinese Catholics and favour their unity with the means proper to the Church.

I am also following with particular interest the events of the entire Chinese People, whom I regard with sincere admiration and sentiments of friendship, to the point where I express the hope "that concrete forms of communication and cooperation between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China may soon be established. Friendship is nourished by contacts, by a sharing in the joy and sadness of different situations, by solidarity and mutual assistance"

[...].

In the light of these unrenounceable principles, the solution to existing problems cannot be pursued via an ongoing conflict with the legitimate civil authorities; at the same time, though, compliance with those authorities is not acceptable when they interfere unduly in matters regarding the faith and discipline of the Church. The civil authorities are well aware that the Church in her teaching invites the faithful to be good citizens, respectful and active contributors to the common good in their country, but it is likewise clear that she asks the State to guarantee to those same Catholic citizens the full exercise of their faith, with respect for authentic religious freedom.

8. [...] Communion and unity - let me repeat (cf. section 5 above) - are essential and integral elements of the Catholic Church: therefore the proposal for a Church that is "independent" of the Holy See, in the religious sphere, is incompatible with Catholic doctrine.

I am aware of the grave difficulties which you have to address in the aforementioned situation in order to remain faithful to Christ, to his Church and to the Successor of Peter. Reminding you that as Saint Paul said (cf. Rm 8:35-39) - no difficulty can separate us from the love of Christ, I am confident that you will do everything possible, trusting in the Lord's grace, to safeguard unity

and ecclesial communion even at the cost of great sacrifices.

12. [...] As I have already observed (cf. section 2 above, paragraph 1, and section 4, paragraph 1), members of Catholic communities in your country - especially Bishops, priests and consecrated persons - are unfortunately not yet allowed to live and to express fully and visibly certain aspects of their belonging to the Church and their hierarchical communion with the Pope, since free contact with the Holy See and with other Catholic communities in various countries is ordinarily impeded. It is true that in recent years the Church has enjoyed greater religious freedom than in the past. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that grave limitations remain that touch the heart of the faith and that, to a certain degree, suffocate pastoral activity. In this regard I renew my earnest wish (cf. section 4 above, paragraphs 2, 3, 4) that in the course of a respectful and open dialogue between the Holy See and the Chinese Bishops on the one hand, and the governmental authorities on the other, the difficulties mentioned may be overcome and thus a fruitful understanding may be reached that will prove beneficial to the Catholic community and to social cohesion.

*Benedict XVI
Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and
Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in
the People's Republic of China
27 May 2007*

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See the complete document at: www.vatican.va

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

This is the first time that a Pope has written a letter to the Catholic community of a particular region. The reason is clear, since the Holy Father has wished to show how closely he and the Church support a community which has suffered and continues to suffer grave tribulations. In spite of the fact that the letter was forbidden by the Government, the faithful were able to receive it with holy and filial obedience, confirming their awareness of being an important part of the universal Church. Until now the communist regime has granted freedom of cult only to the China Catholic Patriotic Association which does not officially recognize the Pope's primacy. Many members of this Association secretly belong to the Church which has remained faithful to Rome in clandestinity. This is why the statement that there are two Churches in China - one official and the other clandestine - is not correct, for there is only one Church which is living this extremely difficult situation. It is estimated that of the 12 million Chinese Catholics in 150 dioceses, about two thirds refuse the control of the Patriotic Association. The Pope's letter will help to nourish their faith, helping them to feel united with and supported by the Holy See.

APRIL

APRIL

That the Lord may bless the farmers' work with an abundant harvest and sensitize the richer populations to the drama of hunger in the world.

4. [...] Without doubt, the most important value at stake when we look at the earth and at those who work is the principle that brings the earth back to her Creator: *the earth belongs to God!* It must therefore be treated according to his law. If, with regard to natural resources, especially under the pressure of industrialization, an irresponsible culture of "dominion" has been reinforced with devastating ecological consequences, this certainly does not correspond to God's plan. "Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air" (Gn 1:28). These famous words of *Genesis* entrust the earth to man's use, not abuse. They do not make man the absolute arbiter of the earth's governance, but the Creator's "co-worker": a stupendous mission, but one which is also marked by precise boundaries that can never be transgressed with impunity.

This is a principle to be remembered in agricultural production itself, whenever there is a question of its advance through the application of biotechnologies, which cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of immediate economic interests. They must be submitted beforehand to rigorous scientific and ethical examination, to prevent them from becoming disastrous for human health and the future of the earth.

5. The fact that the earth belongs constitutively to God is also the basis of the principle, so dear to the Church's social teaching, of the *universal destination of the earth's goods* (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 6). What God has given man, he has given with the heart of a father who cares for his children, no one excluded. God's earth is therefore also man's earth and that of all

mankind! This certainly does not imply the illegitimacy of the right to property, but demands a conception of it and its consequent regulation which will safeguard and further its intrinsic "social function" (cf. *Mater et Magistra*, n. 111; *Populorum progressio*, n. 23).

Every person, every people, has the right to live off the fruits of the earth. At the beginning of the new millennium, it is an intolerable scandal that so many people are still reduced to hunger and live in conditions unworthy of man. *We can no longer limit ourselves to academic reflections*: we must rid humanity of this disgrace through appropriate political and economic decisions with a global scope. As I wrote in my Message to the Director-General of the FAO on the occasion of World Food Day, it is necessary "to uproot the causes of hunger and malnutrition" (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano English edition*, 1 November 2000, p. 3). As is widely known, this situation has a variety of causes. Among the most absurd are the frequent conflicts within States, which are often true wars of the poor. And there remains the burdensome legacy of an often unjust distribution of wealth in individual nations and at the world level.

6. [...] The great problems posed by the agricultural sector, in which you are directly involved, should be faced not only as "technical" or "political" problems, but at their root as "moral problems".

John Paul II
Jubilee of the agricultural world
11 November 2000

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See more at www.vatican.va:

Message of his Holiness Benedict XVI to Mr Jacques Diouf,
Director General of FAO on the occasion of World Food Day

2007.

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

It has been calculated that in India during the past ten years about 150.000 poor peasants have committed suicide, weighed down by their debts. The exacting conditions of the market together with many other factors have made their situation unbearable.

Other situations of distress exist among the peasants of many third world countries. Structural injustice, the chronic lack of resources, natural calamities, the inefficient and at times corrupt government programs which are not sufficiently politically sensitive - among other reasons - are some of the causes which keep them in their endless poverty.

This situation, together with the drama of hunger in the world, is of great concern to the Holy Father and he asks us for our prayers. He has called on the authorities of the nations to adopt effective means, such as for example policies which give peasants technical and accountancy assistance, thus allowing them to modernize their production; and that they be helped to sell their products better at a fair price.

The increase of productivity through the use of better seed and incentives is a real possibility today. What is lacking is distribution of both food and the technology to produce and market it. Local production, when it exists, must compete on unequal terms with the international market. Many rich nations protect their agriculture with subsidies, while poor countries do not give priority

to change in the sector.

Let us pray that through the appreciation and respect for these peasants and their cultures adequate means may be found for the accomplishment of the Development Objectives of the Millennium: in 1996 the World Summit on Food proposed the reduction by half of hunger in the world by 2015. The reality is that today there are 820 million more hungry people than there were in 1996. And this number increases by four million every year.

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: Lord, the earth is full of your grace: Ps 103.

Second reading: The meaning of the goods of the earth: 1Tm 6:6-19.

Gospel: God clothes the flowers of the field: Mt 6:25-34.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Let us comment together on the situations which afflict the peasants in our country.
2. Why does the Pope say that the problems which afflict the agricultural world are "moral problems" rather than "technical problems?"
3. What can we do to help alleviate hunger in the world?

MISSION INTENTION

That the Christians who operate in the territories where the conditions of the poor, the weak and the women and children are most tragic, may be signs of hope, thanks to their courageous testimony to the Gospel of solidarity and love.

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.

34. Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. 1Co 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (v. 3). This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter.

Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be

personally present in my gift.

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

This duty is a grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: "We are useless servants" (Lk 17:10). We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so. There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2Co 5:14).

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Deus Caritas Est"
25 December 2005

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See complete document at: www.vatican.va

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

The prayer intention for this month expresses the Holy Father's closeness to those who serve evangelization in places afflicted by war, natural tragedies, grave injustice, forced migration, shortage of resources, etc. As always, the most injured are "the weak, the little ones, the women and children". The Church wishes to show them with concrete gestures God's love and predilection for those who suffer most. The lives of priests and consecrated people, catechists and communities, must bear witness to this solidarity and love of God for his most under-privileged sons and daughters. This is what we ask for this month, giving our spiritual support to those who have to announce the faith under tragic conditions.

Let us listen to John Paul II's address poor people in Peru: "I wish to say from the beginning that I admire and encourage with all my heart the unselfish work of the priests, religious, nuns and lay people who, following Jesus' example and in communion with the entire Church, are devoted to serving and helping you; bearing witness to Christ who being rich freely became poor, and who identified himself with the humble, making them his disciples and promising them his kingdom." (in "VILLA EL SALVADOR", Perú, February 5, 1985).

MAY

MAY

That the laity and the Christian communities may be responsible promoters of priestly and religious vocations.

3. [...] Dear *Serrans*, you are committed in a special way to promoting vocations. Never forget that yours must be above all a commitment to prayer, prayer which is constant, unwavering and full of trust. Prayer moves the heart of God. It is the powerful key to resolving the vocations question. But at the same time prayer for vocations is also a school of life, as I had occasion recently to point out: "By praying for vocations we learn to look with Gospel wisdom at the world and at each person's need for life and salvation; it is a way of sharing in Christ's love and compassion for all mankind..." (*Message for the 38th World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, 14 September 2000, n. 6).

4. Along with prayer, the work of fostering vocations also requires a constant effort to bring the need to people's attention through personal witness, so that God's call may encounter a ready hearing and generous response in those to whom it is directed. This is the aim of your efforts to spread an authentic *culture of vocations*.

[...]

Within the People of God, there is a specific mission awaiting each one. Because the needs of the "harvest" are so great, all the members of God's People must grow in the awareness of "being called". Significant are the gifts and tasks associated with the involvement of Christians in the temporal order. These are above all the responsibility of the laity. But a relevance all their own belongs to the ministries directed to the guidance and growth in holiness of the ecclesial community, namely the priesthood and the consecrated life. As *Serrans* you understand this, and members

of the laity that you are, you are committed to fostering such vocations.

5. Your commitment to fostering vocations, dear Serrans, fits into this ecclesial framework. Your dedication to it ensures that the problem of vocations does not remain a concern for pastors alone, but is brought to the attention of all, involving families and teachers in particular. And this is vitally important.

[...]

John Paul II
Address to the members of Serra International
7 December 2000

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

Many lay Christians in many parts of the world complain of the scarcity of vocations for the priesthood and consecrated life. They complain and... only complain, thinking that there is nothing they can do about it. They sometimes imagine that this task is only for priests and nuns. But the Holy Father's prayer intention for this month tells us something else: it makes it clear that lay people and the entire community too have the responsibility of actively participating in vocational promotion. How? What can be done? There are various activities which Christian people can and must develop in their communities to succeed in creating what Pope John Paul called a "vocational culture". It can be defined as the propitious environment lived in a local Church which helps

towards God calling young people to follow him. This vocational culture becomes a reality with practical actions:

- Unceasingly praying publicly for new vocations. Listening to the theme in Masses, holy hours, community meetings, pastoral training, etc.

- Also asking for the perseverance of those who already have been called (one can ask with the name and surname, commending the seminarians and nuns of the diocese).

- Inviting young religious to bear witness during Masses or youth meetings.

- Organizing activities during the Prayer Week for Vocations, in May.

- Stimulating appreciation of all who are consecrated, the bishop, the parish priest, the nuns; defending them, taking care of them and celebrating the anniversaries of their ordination or consecration.

- Creating a vocational group in the parish or college which takes on the responsibility of keeping the theme alive.

John Paul II addressed the precedent message to the members of Serra International, a lay movement whose specific charisma is precisely the task of promoting vocations. From the parishes or communities in which they are present, they are the motors of this vocational work of lay people, sometimes for the entire diocese.

If you are interested in contacting and inviting them, visit their web page at www.serra.org.

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCHARIST:

Mass for vocations (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: "Leave your country and your father's house": Gn 12:1-4.

Responsorial Psalm: Lord, I come to do your will: Ps 39.

Second reading: See that I am standing at the door and calling: Rv 3:14-22.

Gospel: The harvest is abundant: Mt 9:35-38.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What do I do personally and what do we do as a community to promote priestly and religious vocations?
2. Why is it important that we understand that vocational promotion is not only the task of the religious but of the entire Christian community?

3. Which of the above-mentioned practical measures could we start putting into effect in our community and within our families?

MISSION INTENTION

That the recently founded Catholic Churches, grateful to the Lord for the gift of faith, may be ready to share in the universal mission of the Church, offering their availability to preach the Gospel throughout the world.

"All the Churches for all the world"

On the occasion of the World Mission Day, I would like to invite the entire People of God - Pastors, priests, men and women religious and lay people - to reflect together on the urgent need and importance of the Church's missionary action, also in our time. Indeed, the words with which the Crucified and Risen Jesus entrusted the missionary mandate to the Apostles before ascending to Heaven do not cease to ring out as a universal call and a heartfelt appeal: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you". And he added, "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:19-20).

[...]

"All the Churches for all the world": this is the theme chosen for the next World Mission Day. It invites the local Churches of every continent to a shared awareness of the urgent need to relaunch missionary action in the face of the many serious challenges of our time. The conditions in which humanity lives have of course changed and in recent decades, especially since the Second Vatican Council, a great effort has been made to spread the Gospel.

However, much still remains to be done in order to respond to the missionary call which the Lord never tires of addressing to every one of the baptized. In the first place, he continues to call the Churches of so-called "ancient tradition", which in the past provided the missions with a consistent number of priests, men and women religious and lay people as well as material means, giving life to an effective cooperation between Christian communities. This cooperation has yielded abundant apostolic fruit both for the young Churches in mission lands as well as in the ecclesial situations from which the missionaries came.

The Good Shepherd also invites the recently evangelized Churches to dedicate themselves generously to the *missio ad gentes*. Despite the many difficulties and obstacles they encounter in their development, these communities are constantly growing. Fortunately, some of them have a large number of priests and consecrated persons, many of whom, although there are so many needs in loco, are nevertheless sent to carry out their pastoral ministry and apostolic service elsewhere, even in lands evangelized long ago.

Thus, we are witnessing a providential "exchange of gifts" which redounds to the benefit of the entire Mystical Body of Christ. I warmly hope that missionary cooperation will be intensified and that the most will be made of the potential and charisms of each one. I also hope that World Mission Day will contribute to making all the Christian communities and every baptized person ever more aware that Christ's call to spread his Kingdom to the very ends of the earth is universal.

"The Church is missionary by her very nature", John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, "for Christ's mandate is not something contingent or external, but reaches the very heart of the Church. It follows that the universal Church and

each individual Church is sent forth to the nations... It is highly appropriate that young Churches "should share as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the Church. They should themselves send missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world, even though they are suffering from a shortage of clergy" (n. 62).

Benedict XVI
Message for the 81st World Mission Sunday 2007
27 May 2007

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See more at www.vatican.va
John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, n° 62-79

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

The prayer intention for this month is connected with the missionary intention for October. Now in May we are calling in particular on the recently founded local Churches. They are invited, from their youth and poverty of resources, to be open to sending missionaries to other Christian communities. In October we will be invited to pray that the entire People of God may assume its missionary responsibility.

This is not unfamiliar language for our members of the Apostleship of Prayer. We were born in an ecclesial context of missionary expansion, when the frontiers of evangelization were

opening onto distant countries we were not able to go to before. Our foundation in 1844 was on the day of Saint Francis Xavier, and the novelty of the message of this proposal, which from the start captivated thousands and then millions of Christians, was that the missionary responsibility was the task of all people: everyone can contribute to the Church and the missions through the simple offering to God of their lives and daily activities. Work, suffering, joy and sadness - everything can be united to Jesus' eucharistic sacrifice and thus offered for the missionary task of the Church. Therefore no-one is too poor to be able to help, even if it is through offering the suffering of an infirmity or his/her old age. If one cannot go as a missionary to distant lands, one can pray for them and in this way associate one's own life to the Church's work.

Let us ask this month that the newest, and often poorest, Churches may also be available to share in this task. The missionary dimension is essential for the Church and therefore we cannot remain outside it. Everyone must and can contribute to it. "The whole Church and each Church is sent to the people". The younger communities will be able to already do it through their prayer, which unites them spiritually to the great Church and its concerns. And one also can hope that they will be able to send missionaries to places where evangelizing ministers are very scarce.

JUNE

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JUNE

That international attention towards the poorer countries may give rise to more concrete help, in particular to relieve them of the crushing burden of foreign debt.

[...] Debt relief is, of course, only one aspect of the vaster task of fighting poverty and of ensuring that the citizens of the poorest countries can have a fuller share at the banquet of life. Debt relief programmes must be accompanied by the introduction of sound economic policies and good governance. But, just as important if not more so, *the benefits which spring from debt relief must reach the poorest*, through a sustained and comprehensive framework of investment in the capacities of human persons, especially through education and health care. The human person is the most precious resource of any nation or any economy.

Debt relief is, however, urgent. It is, in many ways, a precondition for the poorest countries to make progress in their fight against poverty. This is something which is now widely recognized, and credit is due to all those who have contributed to this change in direction. We have to ask, however, why progress in resolving the debt problem is still so slow. Why so many hesitations? Why the difficulty in providing the funds needed even for the already agreed initiatives? *It is the poor who pay the cost of indecision and delay.*

I appeal to all those involved, especially the most powerful nations, not to let this opportunity of the Jubilee Year pass, without taking a decisive step towards definitively resolving the debt crisis. It is widely recognized that this can be done.

John Paul II
Message to the group "Jubilee 2000 debt campaign"
23 September 1999

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Trade conditions favourable to poor countries, including, above all, broad and unconditional access to markets, should be made available and guaranteed in lasting and reliable ways.

Provision must also be made for the rapid, total and unconditional cancellation of the external debt of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) and of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Measures should also be adopted to ensure that these countries do not fall once again into situations of unsustainable debt.

Developed countries must also recognize and implement fully the commitments they have made with regard to external aid.

*Benedict XVI
Letter to Dr Angela Merkel
Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany
16 December 2006*

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See more at www.vatican.va:
John Paul II, Apostolic Letter "Tertio Millennio Adveniente",
10 November 1994

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

In many poor countries the sums spent on repaying the foreign debt and the interest on it is four times what is devoted to public health. The result of this is that every year about 20 million children die of hunger and avoidable illnesses.

To begin with, we must remember that financing development is not only a technical task. The Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, archbishop Celestino Migliore, stated in October 2007 that "No human activity is produced outside the sphere of moral judgment. For this reason the activities which bear lasting consequences for the lives of entire populations, especially in their poorest sectors, deserve particular attention and careful moral examination".

The total external debt of developing countries passed from 1,500 million dollars in 1990 to 2,400 million dollars in 2001. There is good reason to say that these debts exist through the creditors' bad management. The result is a recurring crisis of the debt which has provoked a general loss of financial resources over the years, depriving these nations of their essential vital resources for basic development, including the minimum level of health and educational services (cf. Migliore).

This precedent has direct repercussions on the quality of life and the dignity of persons. Those who have sunk into increasingly more degraded conditions are losing "social relations and networks which are necessary for maintaining personal integrity and dignity [...]; this is the case of old people abandoned to themselves, the uninsured sick, the unemployed, unqualified

workers, migrants who do not find work, women and children who suffer because of the break-up of families, all those who meet with precarious situations", which grow worse in this context.

The search for solutions has certainly advanced, for example the Initiative for the Most Indebted Countries (PPME Initiative), developed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Twenty three countries have adhered to their program and accepted their conditions for eliminating their debt, and others are joining. But certainly, in this context, the participation of all the actors is needed: local governments with an implementation of efficient policies, the solidarity of the international community and, on the part of the creditor organisms, an attitude which also considers moral criteria.

The Pope asks us to pray this month that this or other initiatives bring prompt and effective alleviation to the poorer countries and their people, because they continue to have children who die of hunger.

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

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

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: True fasting is justice: Is 58:1-11.

Responsorial Psalm: Lord, build up the unity of all peoples: Ps 121.

Second reading: Injustice cries before God: Jm 5:1-6.

Gospel: All are invited to the banquet of humanity: Lk 14:12-14.

**QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL
AND GROUP REFLECTION**

1. Observing the world situation of injustice and poverty, how can I develop a more just behaviour pattern in my own life which stimulates others too to bring greater justice to my society?
2. What does saying that the solution to the problem of external debt is more a moral than a technical theme mean? Why could a solution based only on economical criteria be immoral?
3. As a community and as a family how can we contribute to achieving greater justice in the distribution of resources?

MISSION INTENTION

That the particular Churches operating in regions marked by violence may be sustained by the love and concrete closeness of all the Catholics in the world.

3. Today, after 40 years of fruitful collaboration in the Church, we can look with joy at this abundant harvest, fruit of the great and inexhaustible love of German Catholics for their sister Churches in Latin America. It guarantees help in the formation of priests, religious and catechists as well as in the building of churches, chapels, seminaries, parish centres and convents. Cars,

other vehicles and numerous other instruments useful for the work of evangelization and for pastoral needs are also made available. [...]

4. The concrete gestures of affection towards the sister Churches, economic help and other signs of solidarity express the mystery of the Church as *Communio*: all are members of one Body and Christ is the Head. I wish to express my appreciation also for the twinning between German and Latin American Dioceses that has sprung up with the help of *ADVENIAT* and in the mutual exchange of giving and receiving that produced good and abundant fruits of solidarity.

John Paul II
Message to the President of the Episcopal action "Adveniat"
30 August 2001

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Charity has to be understood in the light of God who is *caritas*: God who loved the world so much that he gave his only Son (cf. Jn 3:16). In this way we come to see that love finds its greatest fulfilment in the gift of self. This is what *Caritas Internationalis* seeks to accomplish in the world. The heart of *Caritas* is the sacrificial love of Christ, and every form of individual and organized charity in the Church must always find its point of reference in him, the source of charity.

This theological vision has practical implications for the work of charitable organizations, and today I should like to single out two of them.

The first is that every act of charity should be inspired by a

personal experience of faith, leading to the discovery that God is Love. The *Caritas* worker is called to bear witness to that love before the world. Christian charity exceeds our natural capacity for love: it is a theological virtue, as Saint Paul teaches us in his famous hymn to charity (cf. 1Co 13). It therefore challenges the giver to situate humanitarian assistance in the context of a personal witness of faith, which then becomes a part of the gift offered to the poor. Only when charitable activity takes the form of Christ-like self-giving does it become a gesture truly worthy of the human person created in God's image and likeness. Lived charity fosters growth in holiness, after the example of the many servants of the poor whom the Church has raised to the dignity of the altars.

The second implication follows closely from the first. God's love is offered to everyone, hence the Church's charity is also universal in scope, and so it has to include a commitment to social justice. Yet changing unjust structures is not of itself sufficient to guarantee the happiness of the human person.

Benedict XVI
Address to the participants in the eighteenth General Assembly
of Caritas Internationalis
8 June 2007

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

The practice of solidarity between different local Churches is as old as Christianity. Paul's letters tell of the collection of the Macedonians and Achaians to help the poor of Jerusalem (cf. 2Co

8-9; Rm 15:25-27). "It is a question of balancing what happens to be your surplus now against their present need, and one day they may have something to spare that will supply your own need. That is how we strike a balance" (2Co 8:14).

In modern times various organizations are developing networks of help to the poor Churches. Some German foundations stand out such as Caritas (founded more than a hundred years ago) Adveniat, Misereor, Missio, "Aid to the Church in Need", Renovabis, etc. There are many more, also in other countries, which we are not mentioning here.

Solidarity among Churches has other expressions besides the economic one. The Pope asks us this month for the solidarity of our prayer with the regions marred by violence.

We quote, as an example of this, part of the message sent to cardinal John Njue, president of the Episcopal Conference of Kenya, by archbishop Paul Ruzoka from Tanzania after the beginning of the conflicts in this country at the end of 2007: "at this moment of need for the people of Kenya, we wish to express our solidarity to you and the people of Kenya. It is a difficult time for all of you and, as friends and neighbours, we promise our prayers so that peace and understanding may come to you".

JULY

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JULY

That the Christians of the Middle East may live their faith in full freedom and be an instrument of peace and reconciliation.

I greet with affection the communities that are, or feel like, a "little flock" either due to the diminished numbers of their brothers and sisters (cf. Lk 12:32), or because they are immersed in a society composed of a majority of believers from other religions, or due to the serious hardships and difficulties being currently experienced by some of the nations in this area. I am thinking above all of countries marked by strained relations and often marred by brutally violent incidents which, as well as causing widespread destruction, strike without pity helpless and innocent people. The daily news coming from the Middle East shows a growth of alarming situations, seemingly with no possible escape. They are events which naturally give rise, in those involved, to recriminations and rage, leading them to thoughts of retaliation and revenge.

We know that these are not Christian sentiments; to give in to them would leave us callous and spiteful, far from that "gentleness and lowliness" which Jesus Christ proposed to us as the model of behaviour (cf. Mt 11:29). Indeed, we could lose the opportunity to make a properly Christian contribution to the solution of the grave problems of our time. It would not be at all wise, especially now, to spend our time asking who has suffered the most or presenting an account of injustices suffered, listing the reasons which reinforce one's own argument. This has often happened in the past, with results which to say the least were disappointing. Suffering in the end affects everyone, and when one person suffers he should first of all wish to understand how much someone else in a similar situation suffers. Patient and humble dialogue, achieved through listening to each other and being intent upon understanding someone else's situation has already bored

positive results in many countries previously devastated by violence and revenge. A little more trust in the compassion of others, especially those suffering, cannot but bear efficacious results. Today, many parties rightly plead for this interior disposition.

To you, dear brothers and sisters [...] I express with affection my personal closeness in this situation of human insecurity, daily suffering, fear and hope which you are living. I repeat to your communities the words of the Redeemer: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give to you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). You can rely on my full solidarity with you in your current circumstances. In this regard, I am sure that I speak for the universal Church. Thus neither individual Catholics nor their communities, should feel alone or abandoned. Your Churches are accompanied in their difficult journey by prayer and by the charitable support of the particular Churches throughout the whole world, according to the example and spirit of the early Church (cf. Ac 11:29-30).

In the present circumstances, marked little by light and too much by darkness, it is a cause of consolation and hope for me to know that the Christian communities in the Middle East, whose intense suffering I am well aware of, continue to be vital and active communities, resolute in bearing witness to their faith with their specific identity in the societies in which they are situated. They wish to contribute in a constructive manner to the urgent needs of their respective societies and the whole region. Saint Peter, writing his First Letter to a rather poor and marginalized community, persecuted and held in little regard by the society of that time, did not hesitate to say that their difficult situation should be considered a "grace" (cf. 1P 1:7-11). In fact, is it not a grace to be able to participate in the sufferings of Christ, uniting oneself to the action with which he took unto himself our sins in order to atone for them? May Catholic communities, often living in difficult situations, be aware of the powerful force which emanates from

suffering accepted with love. Such suffering can change the hearts of others and the heart of the world. I encourage each of you therefore to carry on with perseverance, comforted by the knowledge of the "price" with which Christ has redeemed us (cf. 1Co 6:20). [...]

*Benedict XVI
Christmas Message to Catholics
living in the Middle East Regions
21 December 2006*

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

Before the VII century Arab and islamic conquest, Christians formed 95% of the population along the south eastern coasts of the Mediterranean. Today, with 12 million faithful, they are less than 6% and the numbers are constantly decreasing. The conflicts which followed the First World War drove about 10 million Christians to emigrate in search of better prospects for the future. The present most serious case is the one affecting Iraq. Of the million and a half Christians who lived there before the war initiated by Bush in 2003, today only about 500 thousand remain. The situation in the Holy Land is also alarming. In 1948 Christians formed about 85% of the population of Bethlehem, now they are 12%. In Jerusalem in 1992 they were 53%, now they are 2%. In Lebanon at the time of independence in 1932 Christians were 55%, today they are 35%. In Syria the Christian community represented a quarter of the population, now they are only 10%.

We can read into these figures and percentages unimaginable suffering, injustices and violence borne by the

Christians in these regions. Bloody conflicts, religious intolerance, persecution, forced emigration are some of the tragedies which still today continue to cause sadness and suffering to millions of the faithful. A dramatic reality for the Churches which are the cradle of Christianity for the rest of the world. This is why the Holy Father asks that we pray for them, that they may live their faith in freedom and that peace and reconciliation may come about in their countries.

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for reconciliation (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: It is to your descendants that I will give this land: Gn 12:1-7.

Responsorial Psalm: Blessed are the builders of peace: Ps 84.

Second reading: May all enmity between you disappear: Jm 4:1-10.

Gospel: The judgment of him who is aggressive against his brother:
Mt 5:20-24.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Are you aware of the need to pray and support our many brothers who live their faith in far more difficult conditions than

we do?

2. To what extent do my acts of intolerance or violence against others who have different customs or ideas persist?

3. What initiatives could we take in our own neighbourhood or Christian community to help build a reconciled and peaceful world?

MISSION INTENTION

That the Church may be the seed and nucleus of a humanity reconciled and reunited in God's one and only family, thanks to the testimony of all the faithful in every country in the world.

5. [...] Be men and women who are free and responsible; make the family a centre that radiates peace and joy; be promoters of life, from its beginning to its natural end; protect the elderly, since they deserve respect and admiration for the good they have done. The Pope also expects young people to seek to sanctify their work, carrying it out with technical skill and diligence, so as to contribute to the progress of all their brothers and sisters, and to shed the light of the Word upon all human activities (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 36).

But above all, the Pope wants them to set about building a more just and fraternal society, fulfilling their duties towards the State: respecting its laws; not allowing themselves to be swept along by hatred and violence; seeking to be an example of Christian conduct in their professional and social milieu, distinguishing themselves by the integrity of their social and professional relationships. They should remember that excessive ambition for wealth and power leads to corruption of oneself and others; there are no valid motives that would justify attempting to impose one's own worldly aspirations-economic or political-

through fraud and deceit.

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

Benedict XVI
Apostolic journey to Brazil on the occasion of the fifth
General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and Caribbean
meeting with youth
10 May 2007

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Instead of a comment we present this prayer pronounced by Pope John Paul II in Colombia, a land which greatly yearns for the "reconciled humanity" for which we pray this month.

1. Blessed be you, Lord and Father who are in heaven,
The Origin of all good, the Giver of all consolation
Because in your infinite goodness,
You have reconciled us with yourself and among ourselves,
Through Jesus Christ, your divine Son.
Help us to accomplish your will
So that your kingdom of justice,

Of love and of peace may come to us.
We trustingly ask you that the Mission of National Reconciliation,
Promoted by the Bishops of Colombia,
May penetrate deeply into the hearts of every Colombian,
And that your message of brotherhood and forgiveness
May overcome the differences, the enmities, the antagonisms,
And strengthen the will for understanding and tolerance.
We beseech you that, with the help of your grace,
The motto "for Reconciliation and Peace"
May become life in individuals, in families and in society.

2. Convert us to you, Father of mercy.
Make us feel the joy of forgiveness received
so that we may know how to share it with others.
Renew us with your Spirit
So that we may know how to discover the evangelical novelty:
"Happy the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9).
Help us contemplate in Christ's face
The Crucified and Risen one,
The mystery of our reconciliation,
The boundless love which excludes all violence,
The living source of a pardon which also embraces our enemies,
So that as sons of the same Father,
We may all recognize ourselves as brothers in his name.
Through his redeeming blood,
Bring to an end the violence and revenge
Which provoke spiralling hatred
And sow destruction, terror and death.

3. We ask you that all the families of Colombia,
overcoming the ill-fated hours of suffering and weeping,
may enjoy the peace Jesus left us;
that in their homes, in those where Christian virtues flower,
the children may grow without uncertainty and fear,
preparing to contribute towards forging a more brotherly and just
society.

Grant the governors,
Responsible for a Nation which is honoured with its Christian
faith,
Spiritual and moral energy
To serve the great cause of the common good;
That, open to the exigencies of your Word,
They may always be sensitive to the yearnings of an entire people,
Who ask for and need peace.
Give your light to all men of good will,
So that, moved by your message of mercy and forgiveness,
They may be ever more convinced of the sterility of violence,
Which has caused so many wounds,
And is not the way towards a just and lasting peace.

4. May the Pastors of the Church in Colombia,
the priests, the religious, the nuns and all the faithful,
be a sign and instrument of reconciliation,
so that the evangelizing action, in its new ardour,
be rich in the fruits of forgiveness and concord,
of justice and peace.
May love for the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Chinququirá,
Queen and Patroness of Colombia,
Stimulate in every Colombian
Feelings of brotherhood and harmony,
To strengthen the Nation like a vast family
Who wants to live, from its Christian faith,
The civilization of love.

We ask this of you, Father of Goodness,
With the strength of your Spirit,
Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace
And source of our reconciliation.
Amen.

John Paul II
Prayer on the occasion of the mission of national reconciliation
promoted by the Bishops of Colombia
17 February 1989

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AUGUST

AUGUST

That public opinion may be more aware of the problem of millions of displaced persons and refugees and that concrete solutions may be found for their often tragic situation.

3. [...] Concern for refugees must lead us to reaffirm and highlight universally recognized human rights, and to ask that the effective recognition of these rights be guaranteed to refugees. For the presentation, on 3 June 1986, of the John XXIII International Peace Prize to Thailand's Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR), I recalled that already in the Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* Pope John had emphasized the urgent need to recognize the rights of *refugees* precisely because they are persons. I stated that "it is our obligation always to guarantee these inalienable rights, which are inherent in every human being and do not depend on prevailing conditions or socio-political situations" (*Insegnamenti* IX, 1, 1986, p. 1751). Thus it is a matter of guaranteeing to refugees the right to establish a family or to be reunited with their families: to have a stable, dignified occupation and a just wage; to live in dwellings fit for human beings; to receive adequate health care - in a word, all those rights solemnly sanctioned since 1951 in the Convention of the United Nations on the Statute for Refugees, and confirmed in the 1967 Protocol on the same Statute.

4. I am well aware that in the face of this grave problem, international organizations, Catholic organisations, and movements of various types have worked intensely, with the support and collaboration of many people, to provide adequate social programmes. I thank them and encourage them to show even greater concern, since it is clear that although much has been done, it is still not enough. The number of refugees is growing, and the resources for receiving and assisting them often prove to be inadequate.

Our first commitment should be to take part in charitable initiatives, to animate and support them through our testimony of love, so that in every country they may have an impact on the processes of educating children and young people in particular, in mutual respect, tolerance and a spirit of service at every level, both in private and public life. In this way many problems will be more easily overcome.

5. I also address myself to you, my dear brothers and sisters who are refugees: live united in your faith in God, in mutual charity and in undaunted hope. All the world knows your problems, and the Church is near to you with the help that her members are working to provide, even though they realize that it is insufficient. In order to alleviate your sufferings, good will and understanding on your part are also necessary.

You are rich in your own civilization, culture, traditions and human and spiritual values. From these you can draw the ability and the strength to begin a new life. As much as possible, you too must help and assist one another in the places where you are temporarily being hosted.

We who are Catholics will accompany you and support you on your way, as we recognize in each one of you the face of Christ, the Exile and Refugee, who said: "Insofar as you did it to one of the least of these brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

John Paul II
Message for Lent 1990

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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.

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

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

The difference between an immigrant, who chooses to leave his country, and a refugee or displaced person, is that the latter faces a serious life-risk or harm if he returns to where he had to flee from motivated by fear. In both cases they must bear great difficulties and challenges, but the refugees' and displaced situation is more tragic.

They are today an estimated 70 million, in numerous countries. There are several organizations and laws made to aid them, insufficient, of course, but that are able to give vital relief to many.

The following testimony gives us some idea of what they endure:

"May 1998 - I am in exile in Thailand, working with Burmese refugees. Many are women. They fled from the killing fields in the jungles near the Thai-Burma border, where fighting between the Burmese military and opposition groups is common. Their villages have been shelled and torched, or relocated. Their farms have been looted or laid with landmines. Their husbands and relatives have been put into forced labour or made to be porters for the Burmese troops. Or else they have been recruited by opposition groups.

These women have experienced inhuman treatment at the hands of Burmese soldiers. Finally, they deserted their villages and

farms to seek refuge in Thailand. All they can bring with them are their personal belongings bundled on their backs and their children in their arms.

As refugee camps along the border are frequently attacked and admission is difficult to gain, the women risk going further inside Thailand. Some end up in the Immigration Detention Centre because they are undocumented. Those who reach Bangkok appeal to UNHCR for protection. They are homeless and helpless, their future unclear. I think these women refugees and Aung San Suu Kyi, who is so well known for her selfless sacrifices for the people of Burma, have one thing in common: hope for their homeland"

(Ko Ko Thett, JRS Asia Pacific).

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCHARIST:

Mass for refugees and exiles (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: The Lord loves the stranger: Dt 10:17-19.

Responsorial Psalm: The Lord is our refuge: Ps 106.

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

Gospel: Take the child and his mother and flee to the land of Egypt: Mt 2:13-23.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What is my attitude towards refugees or immigrants? Am I able to see in them "the face of the exiled and pilgrim Christ"?
2. Are there initiatives or campaigns in my city or area for welcoming and helping immigrants and refugees? How can I participate in them?
3. How can we contribute to an environment of affection and real help for those who have had to leave their land to save their lives or seek better living conditions?

MISSION INTENTION

That those Christians who are discriminated against and persecuted in many Countries because of the name of Christ may have their human rights, equality and religious freedom recognized, in order to be able to live and profess their own faith freely.

It is always necessary to notice this distinctive feature of Christian martyrdom: it is exclusively an act of love for God and for man, including persecutors. At holy Mass today, we therefore pray to the Lord that he who "died praying for those who killed him, [may] help us to imitate his goodness and to love our

enemies" (cf. Opening Prayer). How many sons and daughters of the Church down the centuries have followed his example, from the first persecution in Jerusalem to the persecutions of the Roman emperors, to the multitudes of martyrs in our day! Indeed, even today we receive news from various parts of the world of missionaries, priests, Bishops, men and women religious and lay faithful who are persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, deprived of freedom or prevented from exercising it because they are disciples of Christ and apostles of the Gospel; at times, they even suffer and die for being in communion with the universal Church or for their fidelity to the Pope.

Recalling the experience of the Vietnamese Martyr, Paul Le-Bao-Tinh (d. 1857) in my Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (cf. n. 37), I noted that suffering is transformed into joy through the power of hope that comes from faith. The Christian martyr, like Christ and through union with him, "accepts it in his heart, and he transforms it into an action of love. What on the outside is simply brutal violence - the Crucifixion - from within becomes an act of total self-giving love.... Violence is transformed into love, and death into life" (*World Youth Day 2005, Homily*, Mass on Marienfeld Esplanade, Cologne, 21 August 2005; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 24 August, p. 11). The Christian martyr brings about the victory of love over hatred and death.

Let us pray for those who suffer for being faithful to Christ and to his Church. May Mary Most Holy, Queen of Martyrs, help us to be credible Gospel witnesses, responding to our enemies with the disarming power of truth and charity.

Benedict XVI
Angelus, 26 December 2007

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37. [...] In this context, I would like to quote a passage from a letter written by the Vietnamese martyr Paul Le-Bao-Tinh († 1857) which illustrates this transformation of suffering through the power of hope springing from faith. "I, Paul, in chains for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with me in his praises, for his mercy is for ever (Ps 136 [135]). The prison here is a true image of everlasting Hell: to cruel tortures of every kind-shackles, iron chains, manacles-are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed the three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, for his mercy is for ever. In the midst of these torments, which usually terrify others, I am, by the grace of God, full of joy and gladness, because I am not alone - Christ is with me... How am I to bear with the spectacle, as each day I see emperors, mandarins, and their retinue blaspheming your holy name, O Lord, who are enthroned above the Cherubim and Seraphim? (cf. Ps 80:1 [79:2]). Behold, the pagans have trodden your Cross underfoot! Where is your glory? As I see all this, I would, in the ardent love I have for you, prefer to be torn limb from limb and to die as a witness to your love. O Lord, show your power, save me, sustain me, that in my infirmity your power may be shown and may be glorified before the nations... Beloved brothers, as you hear all these things may you give endless thanks in joy to God, from whom every good proceeds; bless the Lord with me, for his mercy is for ever... I write these things to you in order that your faith and mine may be united. In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor towards the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my

heart". This is a letter from "Hell".

It lays bare all the horror of a concentration camp, where to the torments inflicted by tyrants upon their victims is added the outbreak of evil in the victims themselves, such that they in turn become further instruments of their persecutors' cruelty. This is indeed a letter from Hell, but it also reveals the truth of the Psalm text: "If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I sink to the nether world, you are present there... If I say, "Surely the darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light" - for you darkness itself is not dark, and night shines as the day; darkness and light are the same" (Ps 139 [138]:8-12; cf. also Ps 23 [22]:4). Christ descended into "Hell" and is therefore close to those cast into it, transforming their darkness into light. Suffering and torment is still terrible and well - nigh unbearable. Yet the star of hope has risen-the anchor of the heart reaches the very throne of God. Instead of evil being unleashed within man, the light shines victorious: suffering-without ceasing to be suffering-becomes, despite everything, a hymn of praise.

Benedict XVI
Encyclical Letter "Spe Salvi"
30 November 2007

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

In recent years we have witnessed a recrudescence of

religious intolerance on the part of radicalized groups, as also the persecution and discrimination of Christians on the part of civil authorities in well-defined parts of the world. In 2007 twenty one Catholic missionaries were assassinated in various countries. Anti-Christian attacks on the part of hindu fundamentalism have drastically increased in India, especially in the state of Orissa. In this state, as in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, "anti-conversion" laws are in vigour which punish those who change their religion, and four other states have announced their establishment. The Dalit, a social group considered impure and therefore "untouchable" (it does not even enter into the caste system), is the group which suffers most from this. If the members become Christian they lose the benefits the State offers them to alleviate their miserable conditions of life. In China, Christians who are loyal to the Pope cannot openly live their faith and there are many bishops, priests and lay people who spend years in prison. Even in "Catholic" countries Christians are persecuted when they organize themselves to insist on rights which inconvenience the powerful. In northern Brazil, the most populated Catholic country in the world, many people have been assassinated for having denounced corruption, abuse or the illegal exploitation of the forests. We already spoke in the July Comment of the critical situation of Christians living in the Middle East. Unfortunately many other countries could be added to this list where living the faith is heroic, as in early Christian times.

Let us pray this month that the Lord may support the faith of our brothers who live in their own flesh the Master's fate. The fact that Christians are feared and persecuted in societies where they are small minorities shows the vitality of their faith, and this does not leave those who feel their interests threatened indifferent. Wasn't this the reason for which they killed Jesus? This Christian hope was beautifully incarnated in the Vietnamese martyr mentioned earlier by the Pope in the Encyclical *Spe salvi*: he was able to feel hopeful, even joyful, in the midst of atrocious

suffering. For our part we must be careful never to fall into attitudes of intolerance against those who believe or think differently from us.

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER

That the word of God may be better known, welcomed and lived as the source of freedom and joy.

The Church does not live on herself but on the Gospel, and in the Gospel always and ever anew finds the directions for her journey. This is a point that every Christian must understand and apply to himself or herself: only those who first listen to the Word can become preachers of it.

Indeed, they must not teach their own wisdom but the wisdom of God, which often appears to be foolishness in the eyes of the world (cf. 1Co 1:23).

The Church knows well that Christ lives in the Sacred Scriptures. For this very reason - as the Constitution stresses - she has always venerated the divine Scriptures in the same way as she venerates the Body of the Lord (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 21).

Benedict XVI

*To the participants in the International Congress
organized to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the
dogmatic constitution on divine revelation "Dei Verbum"
16 September 2005*

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My dear young friends, I urge you to become familiar with the Bible, and to have it at hand so that it can be your compass pointing out the road to follow. By reading it, you will learn to know Christ. Note what Saint Jerome said in this regard: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (PL 24,17; cf.

Dei Verbum, 25). A time-honoured way to study and savour the word of God is *lectio divina* which constitutes a real and veritable *spiritual journey* marked out in stages. After the *lectio*, which consists of reading and rereading a passage from Sacred Scripture and taking in the main elements, we proceed to *meditatio*. This is a moment of interior reflection in which the soul turns to God and tries to understand what his word is saying to us today. Then comes *oratio* in which we linger to talk with God directly. Finally we come to *contemplatio*. This helps us to keep our hearts attentive to the presence of Christ whose word is "a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2P 1:19). Reading, study and meditation of the Word should then flow into a life of consistent fidelity to Christ and his teachings.

Saint James tells us: "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act - they will be blessed in their doing" (1:22-25). Those who listen to the word of God and refer to it always, are constructing their existence on solid foundations. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them", Jesus said, "will be like a wise man who built his house on rock" (Mt 7:24). It will not collapse when bad weather comes.

To build your life on Christ, to accept the word with joy and put its teachings into practice: this, young people of the third millennium, should be your programme! There is an urgent need for the emergence of a new generation of apostles anchored firmly in the word of Christ, capable of responding to the challenges of our times and prepared to spread the Gospel far and wide. It is this that the Lord asks of you, it is to this that the Church invites you,

and it is this that the world - even though it may not be aware of it - expects of you! If Jesus calls you, do not be afraid to respond to him with generosity, especially when he asks you to follow him in the consecrated life or in the priesthood. Do not be afraid; trust in him and you will not be disappointed.

Benedict XVI
To the Youth of the World on the occasion of the 21st World Youth Day
9 April 2006

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

In many places Christians celebrate "the month of the Bible" in September. How well do our Christian people know the Word of God? How can we foster a love for the Bible and its assiduous reading?

Pope Benedict XVI recommends for this the *lectio divina* or "spiritual reading" of Sacred Scripture. It consists in poring over a biblical text for some time, reading it and rereading it, as it were, "ruminating" on it as the Fathers say and squeezing from it, so to speak, all its "juice", so that it may nourish meditation and contemplation and, like water, succeed in irrigating life itself.

One condition for *lectio divina* is that the mind and heart be illumined by the Holy Spirit, that is, by the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures, and that they be approached with an

attitude of "reverential hearing" (Angelus, November 6, 2005).

The goal or objective of this spiritual reading of the Word is to make Jesus' practice and attitudes ours. We can also understand the lectio divina following these four steps, in a personal or a community form:

1. *Read* - What does the biblical text say? To understand the Word.
2. *Meditate* - What does the Lord say to us through his Word?
To bring the Word up to date.
3. *Pray* - What do we say to the Lord that is motivated by his Word? To pray the Word.
4. *Actions* - To what actions does the Lord invite us? To practise the Word.

We suggest that you read Jr 15:16; Jn 20:30-31; Heb 4:12-13.

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

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

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: All peoples will go up the mountain of the Lord: Is 2:1-5.

Responsorial Psalm: May the whole earth know your salvation, Lord: Ps 66.

Second reading: You will be my witnesses throughout the earth: Ac 1:3-8.

Gospel: Go out to the whole world and preach the Gospel: Mk

16:15-20.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Do I appreciate and regularly read the Bible? I Explain the reason for my answer.
2. What must we do to love it more and understand it better?
3. To study a given text in-depth I can use the questions indicated in the four steps recently proposed.

MISSION INTENTION

That Christians in Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, who often meet with great difficulties, may not be discouraged from announcing the Gospel to their brothers, trusting in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Brothers, you are exercising your ministry at the service of the Church in conditions that are often difficult and in extremely varied situations. In your service to the People of God, you may rest assured of my brotherly support and that of the universal Church!

Indeed, "if we must say that a Bishop is never alone, inasmuch as he is always united to the Father through the Son in

the Holy Spirit, we must also add that he is also never alone because he is always and continuously united with his brothers in the episcopate and with the one whom the Lord has chosen as the Successor of Peter" (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 8).

The deep communion with one another that you demonstrate and your collaboration, when possible, expressed in various ways, are a precious help in your pastoral task for the good of the people entrusted to your care.

Your closeness to the faithful, especially the loneliest, is an encouragement for them to persevere, steadfast in the Christian faith, and to grow in discovering the Person of Christ despite the difficulties of daily life.

The help you receive in various areas from those Churches which date back to the first evangelization, especially for apostolic personnel or formation, is also an eloquent sign of the solidarity that disciples of Christ must show to one another. [...]

In this perspective, one priority is the formation of the faithful, particularly of women religious and catechists with whose courageous commitment to the service of the Gospel I am familiar.

They will thus become evangelizers who can respond to the challenges of society, strengthened by the truth of Christ. Indeed, for the vitality of the Christian communities their role is of paramount importance.

Together with priests, they contribute their specific and indispensable contribution to the life and mission of the Church. May they be authentic witnesses of Christ everywhere, carrying out with serenity and conviction the tasks entrusted to them!

Moreover, their steadfast Christian faith enables them to

engage in an authentic dialogue with the members of other religions in order to work together to build up your Countries and to foster the common good.

I also encourage you to develop the education of young people in your communities. In order to take on their Christian engagements they are often confronted by complex situations in social life that demand specific pastoral attention.

Benedict XVI
Address to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of
Laos and Cambodia on their "Ad limina visit"
6 September 2007

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

The Catholic communities in Laos and Cambodia are among the smallest in Asia, after the Church in Russia. In Laos there are only 35 thousand Catholics, less than 1% of the six million inhabitants of the country. In Cambodia there are 21 thousand Catholics - the majority of Vietnamese origin - in a population of 12 million. Both communities come from long communist dictatorships which prevented the functioning of the ecclesial structure and hierarchy. In both countries religious vocations are again emerging and the first native priests have been

ordained.

The evangelization of Burma (Myanmar) started in the middle of the XIX century with the arrival of Baptists from the United States, followed next by Catholics. The Christians are now about four million, mostly belonging to Protestant sects. There are six hundred thousand Catholics. 80% of the population (over 42 million) are Buddhist. There are a number of groups of tribal minorities, especially in the north of the country, who get to know and are converted to Christianity in the missionary schools where they have become literate.

Let us pray this month that this Church, which is as small as a mustard seed, may bear witness to Christ and produce abundant fruit. Steeped in a society which is rich in tradition and spirituality, may it be like a leaven in the masses, bringing the novelty of the Gospel which renews all things.

OCTOBER

OCTOBER

That Sunday may be lived as the day on which Christians gather to celebrate the risen Lord, participating in the Eucharist.

With the event of the Resurrection, creation and redemption reach their fulfilment. On the "first day after Saturday", the women and then the Disciples, meeting the Risen One, understood that this was "the day which the Lord has made" (Ps 118[117]:24), "his" day, the *Dies Domini*. In fact, this is what the liturgy sings: "O first and last day, radiant and shining with Christ's triumph".

[...]

How much more necessary it is today to reaffirm the sacredness of the Lord's Day and the need to take part in Sunday Mass! The cultural context in which we live, often marked by religious indifference and secularism that blot out the horizon of the transcendent, must not let us forget that the People of God, born from "Christ's Passover, Sunday", should return to it as to an inexhaustible source, in order to understand better and better the features of their own identity and the reasons for their existence.

The Second Vatican Council, after pointing out the origin of Sunday, continued: "On this day Christ's faithful are bound to come together into one place. They should listen to the Word of God and take part in the Eucharist, thus calling to mind the Passion, Resurrection and Glory of the Lord Jesus and giving thanks to God who "has begotten them again, through the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, unto a living hope'" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 106).

Sunday was not chosen by the Christian community but by the Apostles, and indeed by Christ himself, who on that day, "the first day of the week", rose and appeared to the disciples (cf. Mt 28:1; Mk 16:9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1,19; Ac 20:7; 1Co 16:2), and appeared to them again "eight days later" (Jn 20:26). Sunday is the day on which the Risen Lord makes himself present among his followers, invites them to his banquet and shares himself with them so that they too, united and configured to him, may worship God properly.

Therefore, as I encourage people to give ever greater importance to the "Lord's Day", I am eager to highlight the central place of the Eucharist as a fundamental pillar of Sunday and of all ecclesial life. Indeed, at every Sunday Eucharistic celebration, the sanctification of the Christian people takes place as it will take place until the Sunday that never sets, the day of the definitive encounter of God with his creatures.

Benedict XVI
Letter to Card. Francis Arinze on the occasion of the Study Day in
honour of the 43th anniversary of the promulgation of the
Constitution on the sacred liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium,
27 November 2006

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See more at www.vatican.va

John Paul II, Apostolic Letter "Dies Domini", 31 May 1998.

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

The prayer intention for this month invites us to revalue Sunday as a family day, a day of rest, marked by meeting with the Lord, in particular in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Pope John Paul II offered a beautiful reflection in his 1998 letter *Dies Domini*, in which he explained Sunday as "*dies Domini*, with reference to the work of the creation; *dies Christi* as the day of the new creation and the gift of the Holy Spirit made by the Risen Lord; *dies Ecclesiae* as the day in which the Christian community gathers together for the celebration; *dies hominis* as the day of joyfulness, rest and brotherly charity" (quoted by Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n.73).

The first Christians understood that Jesus himself changed the *sabbath* into Sunday. Origen explains it well in his Commentary to Psalm 91: "The Word moved the feast of the sabbath to the day when the light rose and gave us as the image of true rest the day of salvation, Sunday, the first day of light, in which the Saviour of the world, after fulfilling all his works in the midst of human beings, conquered death and crossed the gates of heaven, going beyond the creation of the six days and welcoming the blessed sabbath and beatific rest". There are people who throughout history came to the point of giving up their lives to defend Sundays. The testimony of a group of Christians who were martyred in the IV century in North Africa is memorable:

"*Sine dominico non possumus!*" Without the gift of the

Lord, without the Lord's day, we cannot live: That was the answer given in the year 304 by Christians from Abitene in present-day Tunisia, when they were caught celebrating the forbidden Sunday Eucharist and brought before the judge. They were asked why they were celebrating the Christian Sunday Eucharist, even though they knew it was a capital offence. "*Sine dominico non possumus*" (Benedict XVI, Vienna, 9 September 2007).

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Votive Mass of the Most Holy Eucharist.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: I will rain down bread for you from the heavens: Ex 16:2-15.

Responsorial Psalm: Lord, you have redeemed us with your blood: Ps 115.

Second reading: Every time you eat of this bread, you announce the Lord's death: 1Co 11:25-26.

Gospel: I am the living bread that comes down from heaven: Jn 6:41-51.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. How do you celebrate Sundays?
2. Do we teach our sons and daughters that this is a day consecrated to God?
3. How can we foster participation in the Eucharist as the most important part of Sunday in our families?

MISSION INTENTION

That the entire People of God, to whom Christ entrusted the mandate to go and preach the Gospel to every creature, may eagerly assume their own missionary responsibility and consider it the highest service they can offer humanity.

"All the Churches for all the world"

Therefore, as has often been said, missionary commitment remains the first service that the Church owes to humanity today to guide and evangelize the cultural, social and ethical transformations; to offer Christ's salvation to the people of our time in so many parts of the world who are humiliated and

oppressed by endemic poverty, violence and the systematic denial of human rights.

The Church cannot shirk this universal mission; for her it has a binding force. Since Christ first entrusted the missionary mandate to Peter and to the Apostles, today it is primarily the responsibility of the Successor of Peter whom divine Providence has chosen as a visible foundation of the Church's unity, and of the Bishops directly responsible for evangelization, both as members of the Episcopal College and as Pastors of the particular Churches (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 63).

[...]

Nor can we forget the many men and women religious and lay volunteers who, together with the priests, spared no effort to spread the Gospel to the very ends of the earth. May World Mission Day be an opportunity to remember in prayer these brothers and sisters of ours in the faith and all who continue to work in the vast field of the mission.

Let us ask God that their example may everywhere inspire new vocations and a renewed mission awareness in the Christian people.

Indeed, every Christian community is born missionary, and it is precisely on the basis of the courage to evangelize that the love of believers for their Lord is measured.

Consequently, we could say that for the individual members of the faithful it is no longer merely a matter of collaborating in evangelizing work but of feeling that they themselves are protagonists and corresponsable. This corresponsibility entails the growth of communion between the communities and increases reciprocal help with regard to the

personnel (priests, men and women religious and lay volunteers) and the use of the means necessary for evangelization today.

Dear brothers and sisters, the missionary mandate entrusted by Christ to the Apostles truly involves us all. May World Mission Day therefore be a favourable opportunity to acquire a deeper awareness and to work out together appropriate spiritual and formative itineraries which encourage inter-Church cooperation and the training of new missionaries to spread the Gospel in our time.

However, let it not be forgotten that the first and priority contribution that we are called to offer to the missionary action of the Church is prayer. "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few", the Lord said; "pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" Lk 10:2.

"First of all, therefore", Pope Pius XII of venerable memory wrote 50 years ago, "Venerable Brethren, We trust that more continuous and fervent prayers will be raised to God for this cause" (*Fidei Donum*, n. 49). Remember the immense spiritual needs of the numerous populations who are far from the true faith or who stand in such great need of the means of perseverance (cf. n. 55). And he urged the faithful to increase the number of Masses offered for the missions, saying that "this is in accordance with the prayers of Our Lord who loves his Church and wishes her to flourish and enlarge her borders throughout the whole world" (*ibid.*, n. 52).

Benedict XVI
Message for the 81st World Mission Sunday 2007
27 May 2007

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

In continuation with the prayer intention for May, this month the Holy Father reminds us that the entire people of God, all baptized people, have a missionary responsibility. The Apostleship of Prayer which, as we said in the Comment for May, was born with a missionary impetus, has participated spiritually in the evangelizing task of the Church in all its 160 years of history. We continue "actively" in this participation, through our ecclesial vocation of prayer and service - active in direct missionary service, in every way we can, active in the prayer and sacrifice which are the basis of our spirituality. Pope John Paul II's words in *Redemptoris Missio*, (n. 78) confirm us in this:

"Among the forms of sharing, first place goes to spiritual cooperation through prayer, sacrifice and the witness of Christian life. Prayer should accompany the journey of missionaries so that the proclamation of the word will be effective through God's grace. In his Letters, Saint Paul often asks the faithful to pray for him so that he might proclaim the Gospel with confidence and conviction. Prayer needs to be accompanied by sacrifice. The redemptive value of suffering, accepted and offered to God with love, derives from the sacrifice of Christ himself, who calls the members of his Mystical Body to share in his sufferings, to complete them in their own flesh (cf. Col 1:24). The sacrifice of missionaries should be shared and accompanied by the sacrifices of all the faithful. I therefore urge those engaged in the pastoral care of the sick to teach them about the efficacy of suffering, and to encourage them to offer their sufferings to God for missionaries. By making such an offering, the sick themselves become

missionaries, as emphasized by a number of movements which have sprung up among them and for them. The solemnity of Pentecost - the beginning of the Church's mission - is celebrated in some communities as a "Day of Suffering for the Missions".

NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER

That all the men and women in the world, especially those who have responsibilities in the field of politics and economics, may never fail in their commitment to safeguard creation.

*To His Holiness Bartholomaios I
Archbishop of Constantinople
Ecumenical Patriarch*

Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family. No nation or business sector can ignore the ethical implications present in all economic and social development. With increasing clarity scientific research demonstrates that the impact of human actions in any one place or region can have worldwide effects. The consequences of disregard for the environment cannot be limited to an immediate area or population because they always harm human coexistence, and thus betray human dignity and violate the rights of citizens who desire to live in a safe environment (cf. *ibid.*, 8-9).

[...]

While it is true that industrializing countries are not morally free to repeat the past errors of others, by recklessly continuing to damage the environment (cf. *ibid.*, 10), it is also the case that highly industrialized countries must share "clean-technologies" and ensure that their own markets do not sustain demand for goods whose very production contributes to the proliferation of pollution.

Mutual interdependence between nations' economic and social activities demands international solidarity, cooperation and

on-going educational efforts. It is these principles which the Religion, Science and the Environment movement courageously upholds.

Benedict XVI
Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople
on the occasion of the seventh Symposium of the Religion,
Science and the Environment Movement
1 September 2007

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To Her Excellency
Professor Mary Ann Glendon
President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

The first concerns the environment and sustainable development. The international community recognizes that the world's resources are limited and that it is the duty of all peoples to implement policies to protect the environment in order to prevent the destruction of that natural capital whose fruits are necessary for the well-being of humanity.

To meet this challenge, what is required is an interdisciplinary approach such as you have employed. Also needed is a capacity to assess and forecast, to monitor the dynamics of environmental change and sustainable growth, and to draw up and apply solutions at an international level.

Particular attention must be paid to the fact that the poorest

countries are likely to pay the heaviest price for ecological deterioration. In my *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, I pointed out that "the destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use, and the violent hoarding of the earth's resources are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development. Indeed, if development were limited to the technical-economic aspect, obscuring the moral-religious dimension, it would not be an integral human development, but a one-sided distortion which would end up by unleashing man's destructive capacities" (No. 9).

In meeting the challenges of environmental protection and sustainable development, we are called to promote and "safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic "human ecology" (*Centesimus Annus*, 38). This in turn calls for a responsible relationship not only with creation but also with our neighbours, near and far, in space and time, and with the Creator.

Benedict XVI
Letter to Professor Mary Ann Glendon, President of
the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on the occasion
of the 13th plenary session
28 April 2007

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See more at www.vatican.va:

Benedict XVI, Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2007, specially N. 8-9.

PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

Studies on climate change confirm that the earth's temperature has considerably increased for reasons for the most part attributable to human activity. From the beginning of the XX century the average temperature of the earth has increased by 0,7 degrees Celsius and may increase an average of 5°C in the course of this century, and possibly even more in some geographical zones.

The effects observed and other related figures are worrying:

- The frequency of natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, cyclones and droughts has quadrupled since 1960.

- The threat determined by the constant deterioration of bio-diversity has been called the "crisis of global extinction": according to the UN 16.306 species are endangered, i.e. one mammal out of every four, one bird out of every eight, a third of the amphibians and 70% of the plants might disappear.

- There might be 670 thousand square kilometres less of the Amazon forest by 2030.

- The glaciers are melting faster than expected and the layer over the arctic has considerably shrunk with the consequent rise in

the level of river and sea waters which produce floods and shrinking coastal land.

- Dissolving in the sea, the carbon emissions produced by human activities increases the acidification of the marine environment thus threatening many species such as oysters, mussels and clams among others. The coral reefs are also endangered.

- Since the Second World War the number of terrestrial vehicles has increased from 40 to 680 million. At present there are 16 thousand commercially active jet planes. The carbon dioxide they emit is the gas which contributes most to the warming of the planet.

- The loss of woodlands, the construction of highways and dams, the spreading of cities, the use of natural habitats for agriculture and mining and the contamination of coastal waters are leading to conditions in which new and old sickness-causing pathogens, bacteria, viruses and micro-organisms can develop.

These data are sufficient to understand the urgency of opening our eyes to the threat hanging over us. This must move us to pray for this intention, as the Pope asks us to, as well as to review our own style of life and consumption.

The nations and people who consume the most are those who contaminate the most and, as always, the most serious consequences are borne by the poorest nations and the people who do not have the resources needed to face the catastrophes or sicknesses which derive from natural devastation.

Once again, the solutions are not only technical but must be the fruit of a moral reflection which considers the good of the entire world population, especially the weakest members.

LITURGY – CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass of thanksgiving (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: God saw all that was made and indeed it was very good: Gn 1:26-31a.

Responsorial Psalm: The splendour of the universe: Ps 104 (103).

Second reading: Hymn to almighty Wisdom: Jb 36:22-37-24.

Gospel: Abandonment to Providence: Lk 12:22-31.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Am I aware of the serious ecological situation which threatens us? What aspects of my own lifestyle must I re-examine and change in order not to continue contributing to damaging our environment?
2. How can we help the people around us to become aware of this serious situation?

3. Let us discuss the importance of these words of Benedict XVI: In fact a development which limits itself to the technical and economic aspects, neglecting the moral and religious dimension, would not be an integral human development and, being unilateral, would end by encouraging man's destructive capacity" (for the World Peace Day 2007, n.9).

MISSION INTENTION

That believers in the different religions, through the testimony of their lives and fraternal dialogue, may clearly demonstrate that the name of God is a bearer of peace.

*To my Venerable Brother
Bishop Domenico Sorrentino
Bishop of Assisi-Nocera Umbra-Gualdo Tadino*

It could be objected that history has experienced the regrettable phenomenon of religious wars. We know, however, that such demonstrations of violence cannot be attributed to religion as such but to the cultural limitations with which it is lived and develops in time.

Yet, when the religious sense reaches maturity it gives rise to a perception in the believer that faith in God, Creator of the universe and Father of all, must encourage relations of universal brotherhood among human beings.

In fact, attestations of the close bond that exists between the relationship with God and the ethics of love are recorded in all great religious traditions.

The gathering that the Servant of God John Paul II organized in Assisi appropriately puts the emphasis on the value of prayer in building peace. Indeed, we are aware of how difficult and, at times, how humanly desperate this process can be. Peace is

a value in which so many elements converge.

To build it, the paths of cultural, political and economic order are, of course, important, but first of all peace must be built in hearts. It is here, in fact, that sentiments develop that can nurture it or, on the contrary, threaten, weaken and stifle it.

Moreover, the human heart is the place where God intervenes.

Benedict XVI
Message to the Bishop Domenico Sorrentino
on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Interreligious
meeting of prayer for peace
2 September 2006

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The themes of peace and tolerance are of vital importance in a world where rigid attitudes so often give rise to misunderstanding and suffering and can even lead to deadly violence.

Dialogue is clearly indispensable if solutions are to be found to the harmful conflicts and tensions that cause so much damage to society. Only through dialogue can there be hope that the world will become a place of peace and fraternity.

It is the duty of every person of good will, and especially of every believer, to help build a peaceful society and to overcome the temptation towards aggressive and futile confrontation between different cultures and ethnic groups. Each of the world's peoples

has a responsibility to make its own particular contribution to peace and harmony by placing its spiritual and cultural heritage and its ethical values at the service of the human family throughout the world.

This goal can only be achieved if at the heart of the economic, social and cultural development of each community is a proper respect for life and for the dignity of every human person. A healthy society always promotes respect for the inviolable and inalienable rights of all people. Without "an objective moral grounding, not even democracy is capable of ensuring a stable peace" (*Evangelium vitae*, 70). In this sense, moral relativism undermines the workings of democracy, which by itself is not enough to guarantee tolerance and respect among peoples.

It is of fundamental importance, therefore, to educate in truth, and to foster reconciliation wherever there has been injury. Respect for the rights of others, bearing fruit in sincere and truthful dialogue, will indicate practical steps that can be taken.

Every person of good will has a duty to work towards this goal. It is all the more urgent, however, for those who recognize in God the One who is Father of all, whose mercy is freely offered to all, who judges with justice and offers to all his life-giving friendship. For Christians, the Creator's generosity is visible in the face of him whom God "made to be sin... so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2Co 5:21), Christ our peace and our true reconciliation.

Benedict XVI
Letter to the Cardinal Walter Kasper on the occasion
of the Second Conference on peace and tolerance organized by
the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in conjunction
with the appeal of conscience foundation

4 November 2005

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

In a world in which religious intolerance is increasing and where it is a sad fact that, invoking reasons of faith, people come to the point of murdering other people, the Pope asks us to pray that the name of God be never used for purposes of death and destruction. May the name of God always be a carrier of peace! The past century and recent years have witnessed tragic genocides among many peoples in which both factions invoked the same God. Religious fanaticism can turn against the very principles it declares to defend. Whoever listens honestly to the true Spirit of God, whatever his religion, will be a person of peace. Even if he is persecuted, calumniated or risks assassination, he will avoid the temptation of violence. To the point of loving his enemy as Jesus taught his followers to do.

This is what we ask for this month, in tune with the "spirit of Assisi", thus called after John Paul II summoned the principal world religious leaders there in 1986 to pray for world peace. Benedict XVI, in a letter sent to Monsignor Domenico Sorrentino in 2006, commented that on this occasion "praying people from different religions were able to show, in the language of witnesses, that prayer does not divide but unites, and that it constitutes a

determining element for an efficacious pedagogy of peace, based on friendship, in reciprocal welcome, in the dialogue between people with different cultures and religions. This pedagogy is more necessary than ever, especially with the new generations in mind. Many young people in the areas of the world marked by conflicts have been educated to feelings of hatred and vengeance in ideological contexts in which the seeds of ancient bitterness are cultivated and hearts are prepared for future violence".

DECEMBER

DECEMBER

That children may be respected and loved and never be the victims of exploitation in its various forms.

Next, looking more closely at the sector of forced migrants, refugees and the victims of human trafficking, we unhappily find many children and adolescents too. On this subject it is impossible to remain silent before the distressing images of the great refugee camps present in different parts of the world. How can we not think that these little beings have come into the world with the same legitimate expectations of happiness as the others? And, at the same time, how can we not remember that childhood and adolescence are fundamentally important stages for the development of a man and a woman that require stability, serenity and security? These children and adolescents have only had as their life experience the permanent, compulsory "camps" where they are segregated, far from inhabited towns, with no possibility normally to attend school. How can they look to the future with confidence? While it is true that much is being done for them, even greater commitment is still needed to help them by creating suitable hospitality and formative structures.

*Benedict XVI
Message for the 94th World Day of Migrants and Refugees
13 January 2008*

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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.

*Benedict XVI
To the Bishops of Sri Lanka on their
Ad limina Apostolorum" visit
7 May 2005*

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The Catholic Church, in her service of the human family, reaches out to all members of Thai society without distinction. Her charitable mission, particularly to the poor and suffering, bears witness to "the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 16). Of particular concern to her is the scourge of AIDS, prostitution and the trafficking of women and children which continue to afflict the countries of the region. Undoubtedly poverty is a major factor underlying this phenomenon and one which the Church constantly addresses.

It must also be acknowledged that the decline in moral values, fuelled by the trivialization of sexuality in the media and entertainment industries, leads to the degradation of women and even the abuse of children. The complexity of this unspeakable human exploitation demands a concerted international response. To this end, I note Thailand's increasing commitment to various international conventions and protocols designed to combat sexual exploitation and trafficking. This international cooperation, coupled with an unbending domestic political resolve to confront the corruption and impunity which facilitate such crimes, will lead

to a turning point of hope and dignity for all concerned. In these efforts I can assure you of the Church's utmost moral support and practical assistance.

Benedict XVI
To H.E. Mr. Chaiyong Satjipanon new Ambassador of
the Kingdom of Thailand to the Holy See
13 December 2007

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

After about 20 years of conflict in northern Uganda, a peace agreement was signed in Juba, Sudan, in February 2008 for a definitive cease-fire between the Ugandan government and the "Lord Resistance Army". This latter has been a brutal rebel force which in the course of two decades has kidnapped over 30.000 boys and girls to force them to enter their fighting forces. We hope that this good news of peace is definitive, in spite of the fact that we see every day that the drama of boy and girl soldiers is far from disappearing. This inhuman practice is repeated in Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo, Colombia, Burma, Nepal, the Philippines, Somalia, Sudan and Sri Lanka (cf. the *Osservatore Romano*, 29/2/2008). UN statistics speak of 300.000 child soldiers in the world; and some people believe that they are many more. Torn from their families, these children are usually obliged to loot, burn, kill and mutilate their own people in combat and attacks on villages. If they disobey they are beaten or killed. The girls are systematically raped and become the sex-slaves of the military commanders.

Another equally dramatic and very widespread situation is that of the traffic of minors for sexual exploitation, especially girls. It is almost impossible to know how many minors are involved, however the International Labour Organization estimates them at about 1.800.000. Most of them are to be found in Asia though we find this reality in many other countries. The average age of the victims of these abuses fluctuates between 14 and 18 (for the child soldiers too) though in both cases some are initiated at 8 or 9.

These are only two forms - perhaps the most brutal - of the serious exploitation of minors in the world today. The mere fact that forty million boys and girls cannot go to school because of armed conflicts reveals the precariousness of their situation and the magnitude of the injustice done to them. The God who came to us as a Child makes us hopeful and stimulates us to pray and work for a more just and respectful world for those who suffer exploitation or mistreatment.

LITURGY - CELEBRATION

EUCCHARIST:

Mass for a need (RM, Masses for various needs).

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD:

First reading: Blessed is he who takes pity on the poor: Pr 14:21-31.

Responsorial Psalm: Lord, come quickly to help us: Ps 30.

Second reading: The end of all sadness, lamentation and distress: Rv 21:1-7.

Gospel: Alas for anyone who scandalizes the little ones: Mt 18:1-

7.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Have I fallen into attitudes of abuse or ill-treatment of the children around me? Which?
2. What situations of the abuse of minors occur in our context?
3. What attitudes must we cultivate and what activities can we carry out in order to improve the respect for boys and girls in our environment?

MISSION INTENTION

That at Christmas the peoples of the earth may recognize in the Word Incarnate the light which illuminates every man and that the Nations may open their doors to Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Let us listen to a second phrase from the liturgy of this holy Night, one taken from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: "Upon the people who walked in darkness a great light has shone" (Is 9:1). The word "light" pervades the entire liturgy of tonight's Mass. It is found again in the passage drawn from Saint Paul's letter to Titus: "The grace of God has appeared" (2:11). The expression "has appeared", in the original Greek says the same thing that was expressed in Hebrew by the words "a light has shone": this "apparition" - this "epiphany" - is the breaking of God's light upon a world full of darkness and unsolved problems. The Gospel then relates that the glory of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and "shone around them" (Lk 2:9). Wherever God's glory appears, light spreads throughout the world. Saint John tells

us that "God is light and in him is no darkness" (1Jn 1:5). The light is a source of life.

But first, light means knowledge; it means truth, as contrasted with the darkness of falsehood and ignorance. Light gives us life, it shows us the way. But light, as a source of heat, also means love. Where there is love, light shines forth in the world; where there is hatred, the world remains in darkness. In the stable of Bethlehem there appeared the great light which the world awaits. In that Child lying in the stable, God has shown his glory - the glory of love, which gives itself away, stripping itself of all grandeur in order to guide us along the way of love. The light of Bethlehem has never been extinguished. In every age it has touched men and women, "it has shone around them". Wherever people put their faith in that Child, charity also sprang up - charity towards others, loving concern for the weak and the suffering, the grace of forgiveness. From Bethlehem a stream of light, love and truth spreads through the centuries. If we look to the Saints - from Paul and Augustine to Francis and Dominic, from Francis Xavier and Teresa of Avila to Mother Teresa of Calcutta - we see this flood of goodness, this path of light kindled ever anew by the mystery of Bethlehem, by that God who became a Child. In that Child, God countered the violence of this world with his own goodness. He calls us to follow that Child.

Benedict XVI
Midnight Mass, Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord
24 December 2005

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But might not this desire for dialogue and collaboration also mean at the same time that we can no longer transmit Jesus Christ's message, no longer propose to humanity and to the world

this call and the hope that derives from it? Those who have recognized a great truth or discovered a great joy have to pass it on; they absolutely cannot keep it to themselves. These great gifts are never intended for only one person. In Jesus Christ a great light emerged for us, the great Light: we cannot put it under a bushel basket, we must set it on a lampstand so that it will give light to all who are in the house (cf. Mt 5:15). Saint Paul travelled tirelessly, taking the Gospel with him. He even felt under a sort of "compulsion" to proclaim the Gospel (cf. 1Co 9:16) - not so much out of concern for the salvation of the single non-baptized person who had not yet been reached by the Gospel, but rather because he was aware that history as a whole could not attain fulfilment until the Gospel had reached the full number (*pléroma*) of Gentiles (cf. Rm 11:25).

To reach its completion, history needs the proclamation of the Good News to all peoples, to all men and women (cf. Mk 13:10). Actually, how important it is that forces of reconciliation, forces of peace, forces of love and of justice flow into one another in humanity! How important it is that in the "budget" of humanity, opposition be aroused and invigorated to challenge the threatening sentiments and the realities of violence and injustice! This is exactly what happens in the Christian mission. Through the encounter with Jesus Christ and his saints, through the encounter with God, humanity's "reserves" are replenished with those forces of good without which all our programmes of social order do not become reality but - in the onslaught of the extremely powerful pressure of other interests contrary to peace and justice - remain no more than abstract theories.

Benedict XVI
To the members of the Roman Curia at the traditional
exchange of Christmas greetings
21 December 2007

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

God had compassion on us, he bent over humanity and lit up our darkness with a baby's smile. Contemplating the Child-God, let us pray for the children of the world in the General Intention for this month: that in their fragility and defencelessness they may be helped and loved, and never be exploited or abused. In this Missionary Intention the Holy Father invites us to pray that Jesus' light may reach all the confines of the earth. That rich and poor, governors and simple citizens, women and men, big and small, all may open the doors of their hearts to Christ's light. May this Light inspire our paths towards the peace and understanding that humanity urgently needs today. A joyous Christmas to you all!

"The people that walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those who live in a land of deep shadow
a light has shone.
You have made their gladness greater,
You have made their joy increase.[...]
For there is a child born for us,
A son given to us
And dominion is laid on his shoulders;
And this is the name they give him:
Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace"
(Isaiah 9).