

Prayer and Service

Praying with the Church during 2012

COMMENTS ON THE 2012 INTENTIONS

EDITORIAL



Dear friends,

This 2011 is an intense and important year for our challenge to renew or better, to re-create the Apostleship of Prayer. The participative process of consultation is moving ahead, and many of you have already sent us your contributions. We look for an updated and ever more meaningful way to share our spiritual treasure today. This is also the year for three

important continental AP/EYM meetings that give us the opportunity to deepen our discussion: Africa (here in the picture), Europe and Asia.

And meanwhile, the mission continues. We see the Holy Father keeps inviting us to collaborate with him in the spread of his monthly prayer intentions. I hereby present you comments on each one of them, done by experts on each of these issues, who have kindly collaborated. I am sure they will be helpful to you and good for the people of God. May the Lord bless your efforts to help the AP members to better understand the challenges the Pope presents us every month with these intentions, opening our horizons to the dimensions of the world.

P. Claudio Barriga, S.J.

JANUARY

GENERAL INTENTION – JANUARY

That the victims of natural disasters may receive the spiritual and material comfort they need to rebuild their lives.

This year the "Great Island" has not been spared by natural disasters. Cyclones have destroyed numerous homes, bridges and roads, and the paddy fields and flocks have been seriously damaged. Some people have died, others have been injured and yet others have lost their possessions. I would like to assure the entire Malagasy people of my closeness in concern and prayer. May God, in his goodness, take pity on his people and hear the voices of those who call him (cf. Ps 5: 3) and implore his aid! And with the Psalmist I say: "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted" (Ps 9b[10]: 12). In this



context it is fortunate that the Solidarity and Development 2008 Prize of the St Matthew Foundation in memory of Cardinal Francis Xavier Van Thuan was awarded last 13 November, on the occasion of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to the AKAMASOA project for small houses for the homeless in Antananarivo.

BENEDICT XVI

***ADDRESS TO H.E. Mr. RAJAONARIVONY NARISOA
NEW AMBASSADOR OF MADAGASCAR TO THE HOLY SEE
18 December 2008***

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On the occasion of the first anniversary of the terrible earthquake that bereaved your country, dear Haitians, I am united with all of you to assure you of my prayers, especially for those who died.

I likewise wish to give you a word of hope in the present, particularly difficult, circumstances. Indeed, it is now time to rebuild, not only the material structures, but also civil, social and religious coexistence. I hope that the Haitian People will play the lead in their current history and in their future, also counting on international aid which has already shown signs of great generosity with financial assistance and through the volunteers who come from all the countries.

I am present through H.E. Cardinal Robert Sarah, President of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum". With his presence and his voice, he brings you my encouragement and affection. I entrust you to the intercession from Heaven of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Patroness of Haiti, who, I am certain, will not be indifferent to your prayers.

May God bless all Haitians.

BENEDICT XVI

***MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF HAITI
FOR THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE EARTHQUAKE
5 January 2011***

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After the Angelus:

My thoughts go at this moment to the peoples of the Pacific and of South East Asia, hit in the past few days by violent natural disasters: the Tsunami in the Islands of Samoa and Tonga and the typhoon in the Philippines, which later also affected Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and the devastating earthquake in Indonesia. These catastrophes have taken a heavy toll of human life, leaving many missing and homeless, as well as causing immense material damage. I am also thinking of those who are suffering because of the floods in Sicily, especially in the Messina area. I ask you all to join me in prayers for the victims and their loved ones. I am spiritually close to the evacuated, and to all those who have been sorely tried, imploring God to relieve their suffering. I make an appeal to ensure that these brothers and sisters will not lack our solidarity and the support of the international community.

BENEDICT XVI
ANGELUS
4 October 2009

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Never before have we seen a natural disaster happening from so close by as the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in March 2011. Images flooded the world through television, newspapers and most of all through internet, where they can still be seen today. Outside a disaster area, memory is short: a week, two weeks at maximum before we lose interest. In the area itself, however, memory can last as long as half a century, if not more, especially among those who have lost everything.

Don't forget. Never forget. One image, two images may have struck you, like that of the man on the viaduct. Water pours into the street below him, black water filled with debris. It rises quickly. Boats appear, afloat in the stream. The man looks down, curious, walks to the other side to see the water continue its path of destruction, walks back again, until he realizes, as did the driver of a car nearby him only seconds earlier, that he actually might not be safe on the viaduct. Then he starts running ... Will he have made it?

We call nature a mother, but she's a fickle one. The trees give their fruit, the fields bring forth grain, rice and potatoes, flowers brighten our day in a million colours, if ... If the sun shines, if it rains, on the right time and in the right quantities, if the earth stays quiet and the sea doesn't move. Let's not talk about the other moving creatures with which we share this planet for better and for worse, varying from domestic animals to destructive locusts and elephants. The man on the viaduct: how well did he know mother nature? He seemed to trust her. He certainly didn't see the blow coming, the rage, the tender face turned evil.

Don't forget. Never forget. But shouldn't we get on with our lives, let bygones be bygones? We should, but without forgetting what we saw that day. One could call it a revelation, something normally hidden in the depth of our heart's knowledge. In an instant it became clear to us, again, that we do not have a lasting place on earth, that nature's motherly care has its limits, and that they are uncharted, unpredictable. Even those warned for the tsunami did not immediately run and were quickly taken over by the events. The man on the viaduct may be anyone of us, when nature turns wild.

We can call nature a mother, in a figurative sense. But we also have a Father, Creator of heaven and earth, literally, and it is to Him that we can safely direct ourselves in prayer. Will he have prayed, the man on the viaduct? How many miracles happen during a tsunami? More than we think, probably, and by far not as many as we would want to. Given their rarity, it is comfort that we better pray for. Comfort is more important than miracles, because it helps nature's victims through the day, through the weeks and years after they have been forgotten by the rest of the world.

Don't forget. Never forget. You may be the man on the viaduct, one day. Mother nature binds us together, for better and for worse. But in God the Father we can put our trust, completely, frail and vulnerable as we are, and put before Him our needs, their needs, those of the victims of natural disasters.

(We could not find again the original video referred to here, but a part can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY2HPT7obWE&feature=relmfu>.)

Marc Lindeijer, S.J.
Works in the Jesuit General Curia for the Causes of Jesuit Saints

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Do I keep myself informed through the news about natural disasters which take place in other parts of the world? In what way am I moved, and how do I make efforts to do something for the people injured by them?
2. Can natural disasters and the suffering they cause be considered as a punishment from God? How should they be interpreted from a Christian point of view?
3. How can we organise ourselves better as Christian community to offer an effective reply, which will help the people who are affected?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Jer 14: 17-22 the misfortune of my people
- Rev. 21: 1-4 the new Jerusalem
- John 9: 1-3 neither did he sin, nor did his parents

MISSION INTENTION - JANUARY

That the dedication of Christians to peace may bear witness to the name of Christ before all men and women of good will.



Conflicts, wars, violence and terrorism have gone on for too long in the Middle East. Peace, which is a gift of God, is also the result of the efforts of men of goodwill, of the national and international institutions, in particular of the states most involved in the search for a solution to conflicts. We must never resign ourselves to the absence of peace. Peace is possible. Peace is urgent. Peace is the indispensable condition for a life worthy of humanity and society. Peace is also the best remedy to avoid emigration from the Middle East. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" we are told in the Psalm (122:6). We pray for peace in the Holy Land. We pray for peace in the Middle East, undertaking to try to ensure that this gift of God to men of goodwill should spread through the whole world.

Another contribution that Christians can bring to society is the promotion of an authentic freedom of religion and conscience, one of the fundamental human rights that each state should always respect. In numerous countries of the Middle East there exists freedom of belief, while the space given to the freedom to practice religion is often quite limited. Increasing this space of freedom becomes essential to guarantee to all the members of the various religious communities the true freedom to live and

profess their faith. This topic could become the subject of dialogue between Christians and Muslims, a dialogue whose urgency and usefulness was reiterated by the Synodal Fathers.

***BENEDICT XVI
HOMILY FOR THE CLOSING
OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
24 October 2010***

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Living in love and in truth

10. In a globalized world marked by increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies, the great religions can serve as an important factor of unity and peace for the human family. On the basis of their religious convictions and their reasoned pursuit of the common good, their followers are called to give responsible expression to their commitment within a context of religious freedom. Amid the variety of religious cultures, there is a need to value those elements which foster civil coexistence, while rejecting whatever is contrary to the dignity of men and women.

The public space which the international community makes available for the religions and their proposal of what constitutes a "good life" helps to create a measure of agreement about truth and goodness, and a moral consensus; both of these are fundamental to a just and peaceful coexistence. The leaders of the great religions, thanks to their position, their influence and their authority in their respective communities, are the first ones called to mutual respect and dialogue.

Christians, for their part, are spurred by their faith in God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, to live as brothers and sisters who encounter one another in the Church and work together in building a world where individuals and peoples "shall not hurt or destroy ... for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Is 11:9).

[...]

Religious freedom in the world

14. Finally I wish to say a word to the Christian communities suffering from persecution, discrimination, violence and intolerance, particularly in Asia, in Africa, in the Middle East and especially in the Holy Land, a place chosen and blessed by God. I assure them once more of my paternal affection and prayers, and I ask all those in authority to act promptly to end every injustice against the Christians living in those lands. In the face of present difficulties, may Christ's followers not lose heart, for witnessing to the Gospel is, and always will be, a sign of contradiction.

Let us take to heart the words of the Lord Jesus: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted ... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied ... Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Mt 5:4-12). Then let us renew "the pledge we give to be forgiving and to pardon when we invoke God's forgiveness in the Our Father. We ourselves lay down the condition and the extent of the mercy we ask for when we say: 'And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us' (Mt 6:12)". [17] Violence is not overcome by violence. May our cries of pain always be accompanied by faith, by hope and by the witness of our love of God. I also express my hope that in the West, and especially in Europe, there will be an end to hostility and prejudice against Christians because they are resolved to orient their lives in a way consistent with the values and principles expressed in the Gospel. May Europe rather be reconciled to its own Christian roots, which are fundamental for understanding its past, present and future role in history; in this way it will come to experience justice, concord and peace by cultivating a sincere dialogue with all peoples.

***BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
WORLD DAY OF PEACE
8 December 2010***

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PASTORAL COMMENT

A hope and a call to engagement in the work of peace and reconciliation

Our world today continues to be torn apart by hatred, dictatorship and violent conflict. We are confronted with a sense of desperation and hopelessness, and ask ourselves whether real peace is at all possible. We see and feel conflict around, whether in separated families, divided societies or degraded environment. Christ experienced the same overwhelming conditions of divisions and hatred within the Jewish society between the poor and the rich, the Roman colonizers and the Jewish people, the 'righteous' and the 'sinners', the Samaritans and the rest of the Jewish community, the Sadducees and Pharisees, the Jews and Gentiles, the slaves and free. It looked as though his mission was not going to succeed in bringing any changes to the society. Yet, in Christ death and resurrection are our victory, and a great message of a committed

Hope. The Father, "in his great mercy, has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable" (1 Peter 1:3). We are not to keep this hope to us; we are to bring it to others.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus had reached a point of hopelessness. The only person they had put their hope in (Jesus) had died a humiliating death. When Jesus appears and walks with them, the road to Emmaus becomes a moment of revelation and belief. Hopelessness is turned into hope, helplessness becomes total engagement. What was even more consoling is that they recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread, in the Eucharist. Later on the Pentecost brought them the fulfillment and the courage to be prophetic, vigilant and engaged Christians.

Similarly we are called to change our situations of conflict and injustice by being prophetic, vigilant and engaged in the service of faith and justice. In this way, we will witness to Christ, the Prince of Peace. To be prophetic is to be present to the people of God, guiding them through the path of peace, reconciliation and justice. To be vigilant is to cultivate the capacity to be proactive in not only reading the Signs of the Times, but in anticipating those signs by advocating for immediate actions that have future positive impact on social transformation. To be engaged is to trust in divine providence and be part of the various processes seeking the fullness of life (John 10:10) for every human person, whether in the sphere of politics, economic, agriculture, trade or technology. Ours is a faith that brings hope that is committed to positive change and realization of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Elias Omondi Opongo, SJ

Jesuit from Kenya, at present pursuing doctoral studies in the UK

FEBRUARY

GENERAL INTENTION - FEBRUARY

That all peoples may have access to water and other resources needed for daily life.

Mr Jacques Diouf,

[...]

In the context of the Decade 2005/ 2015, which the General Assembly of the United Nations has declared "The International Decade of Action: Water for life", this year's theme: Coping with water scarcity, gives us an opportunity to think about the importance of water as a source of life whose availability is essential for the vital cycles of the earth and fundamental for a fully human existence.

We are all aware of the difficulty of achieving at a world level the goal fixed by the international community to halve the number of people who are without access to healthy water and basic hygiene services by 2015, through the development, among other things, of integrated management plans and an efficient use of water resources.

However, we are likewise all convinced of the importance of not falling short of these goals, given the centrality of water in any process destined to foster the promotion of an integral human development.

Furthermore, appropriate investments in the sector of water and hygiene services represent a significant mechanism for accelerating economic growth and sustainable development, for improving human health and hygiene, for uprooting poverty and for combating the degradation of the environment.

Water, a common good of the human family, constitutes an essential element for life; the management of this precious resource must enable all to have access to it, especially those who live in conditions of poverty, and must guarantee the liveability of the planet for both the present and future generations.

Access to water is in fact one of the inalienable rights of every human being, because it is a prerequisite for the realization of the majority of the other human rights, such as the rights to life, to food and to health.

For this reason, water "cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others.... The right to water... finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right" (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, n. 485).

World Water Day is a precious opportunity to encourage the international community to identify effective ways to permit this basic human right to be promoted, protected and enjoyed.

In this regard, the sustainable management of water becomes a social, economic, environmental and ethical challenge that involves not only institutions but the whole of society.

It should be faced in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, that is, through the adoption of a participatory approach that involves both the private sector and above all the local communities; the principle of solidarity, a fundamental pillar of international cooperation, which requires a preferential attention to the poor; the principle of responsibility to the present generation and those to come, from which derives the consequent need to re-examine the models of consumption and production, often unsustainable with regard to the use of water resources.

It is in addition a responsibility that must be shared and that becomes a moral and political imperative in a world that has levels of know-how and technologies that are capable of putting an end to situations of water scarcity and to their dramatic consequences that affect in particular the regions with a lower income, in which access to water can often spark real conflicts, whereas it can become a motive for interregional cooperation wherever people appreciate a farsighted approach founded on hydrological interdependence that binds those who use the water resource in neighbouring countries in a joint agreement.



These are aspects, Mr Director General, that not only demand the responsibility of government leaders and politicians, but that challenge every individual. We are all called to renew our life-styles with an educational effort that can reassign to this common good of humanity the value and respect that it ought to have in our society.

[...]

BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE SIGNED BY CARDINAL TARCISIO BERTONE
TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF FAO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION
OF WORLD WATER DAY 2007
22 March 2007

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See more:

- CONVEGNO GREENACCORD "DAMMI DA BERE". MESSAGGIO DAL VATICANO: "L'ACQUA NON E' UNA MERCE" - Il saluto del segretario del Pontificio Consiglio della Giustizia e della Pace, mons. Mario Toso - 9 July 2006

PASTORAL COMMENT

*Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.
(St. Francis of Assisi: Canticle of the Sun)*

In 2010, the United Nations declared safe and clean drinking water and sanitation a human right, "essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights". Without water, no human being can survive for more than a few days. Lack of access to water kills more children annually than AIDS, malaria and measles combined, while the lack of sanitation affects 40 per cent of the global population.
<http://www.righttowater.info/>

But the challenge to access safe drinking water is not just a problem of people in developing countries. In many developed countries around the world, drinking water becomes expensive when public water sources are being sold by the government to big companies, who then sell that water for a profit, making it subject to market forces. Bottled water also adds a huge amount of plastic bottles to landfills, where they take up to 1,000 years to degrade.

Taking up these concerns, Benedict XVI, in an address at the World Expo in Zaragoza, Spain, in 2008, said that the right to water "is founded on the dignity of the human person; it is necessary in this perspective to examine attentively the approach of those who consider and treat water merely as an economic commodity. Its use must be rational and supportive, the result of a balanced synergy between the public and private sectors."

The indirect use of water for food production raises serious questions about the lifestyle in developed countries. The production of one kilogram of beef requires on global average 16,000 litres of water. To produce one cup of coffee takes on average 140 litres of water. We are all aware of the fact that people in developing countries consume less water, but we should also take into account that the more developed a country is, the more it tends to "import" its water consumption at the expense of other countries. For example, many flowers sold in European markets come from Kenya, where they drain local water resources while Europeans can keep "swimming"; and 65% of Japanese water consumption comes from outside the country, in the form of rice, meat and other goods and services.
<http://www.waterfootprint.org/>

In principle, a simple change in attitude can motivate us to save water every day: to be reverent and appreciative of water, remembering it is a gift from God, not to be wasted. At home, we can show this reverence every time we close the tap while brushing our teeth, when we take a shower rather than a bath, when we fix a leaking tap or faucet, or when we have a vegetarian meal instead of meat. Outside the home, we can be aware of issues around bottled water, buy from local rather than multinational companies in places where tap water is not safe to drink, and get involved in local or national campaigns

against the privatisation of water. This year, we are invited to pray for the success of the 5th World Water Forum from 12th to 17th March 2012 in Marseille, France (<http://www.worldwaterforum.org/>), and to organise a prayer service for World Water Day on 22nd March.

"The water issue is truly a right to life issue." (Holy See delegation at the 4th World Water Forum, Mexico City, 2006)

Uta Sievers
Advocacy Networks & Communication
Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES)
General Curia of the Society of Jesus

Other material:

- Water photos on National Geographic: <http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/freshwater/photos/>
- JPIC Water booklet – See/Judge/Act plus prayer service, 2003: <http://www.ofm-jpic.org/aqua/index.html#english>
- Reflection by Robin Koning SJ, 2004: <http://www.faithdoingjustice.com.au/docs/WaterOfLifeReflection.pdf>
- Vatican Mexico statement, 2006: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_2006_0322_mexico-water_en.html
- Pope Zaragoza statement, 2008: <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=8628>
- World Water Forums:
 - <http://www.worldwaterforum5.org/> (Istanbul 2009)
 - <http://www.worldwaterforum.org/> (Marseille 2012)
- Seven Weeks for Water (WCC), Lent 2011: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/activities/ewn-home/resources-and-links/seven-weeks-for-water.html>
- Italian water campaign, 2011: <http://www.adistaonline.it/index.php?op=articolo&id=49446>
- Water Footprint: <http://www.waterfootprint.org/>
- Right to water: <http://www.righttowater.info/>

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What practical steps do I take to take care of, and value, the water that I consume each day?
2. How can we take part in campaigns or activities which would help to make real the Pope's intention for prayer this month, 'That all peoples may have access to water and other resources needed for daily life.'?
3. Is Jesus the living water who satisfies my thirst? How?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Ezekiel 47, 1-12, the vision of water that flows from the temple
- John 4,7-14, the water of life offered to the Samaritan woman
- John 7, 37-39, the promise of living water

MISSION INTENTION - FEBRUARY

That the Lord may sustain the efforts of health workers assisting the sick and elderly in the world's poorest regions.



My grateful thoughts go to all those who do their utmost, in the various sectors of pastoral health care to live that diakonia of charity that is central to the mission of the Church.

[...]

The theme you have chosen this year "Caritas in Veritate: toward an equitable and human health care", is of particular interest for the Christian community in which care for the human being, for his transcendent dignity and for his inalienable rights is central. Health is a precious good for the person and the community to be promoted, preserved and protected, dedicating the necessary means, resources and energy in order that more and more people may benefit from it.

Unfortunately the fact that still today many of the world's populations have no access to the resources they need to satisfy their basic needs, particularly with regard to health care, is still a problem. It is necessary to work with greater commitment at all levels to ensure that the right to health care is rendered effective by furthering access to basic health care. In our day on the one hand we are witnessing an attention to health that borders on pharmacological, medical and surgical consumerism, almost a cult of the body, and on the other, the difficulty of millions of people in achieving a basic standard of subsistence and in obtaining the indispensable medicines for treatment.

[...]

In this regard, St Augustine taught using concise and incisive words that "justice consists in helping the poor" (De Trinitate, XIV, 9: PL 42, 1045).

To bend down, like the Good Samaritan, over the wounded man left by the roadside is to fulfil that "greater justice" which Jesus asks of his disciples and practised in his life, because the fulfilment of the Law is love. The Christian community, in following in the Lord's footsteps, has complied with his mandate to go out into the world "to teach and to heal the sick" and, down the centuries, "has felt strongly that service to the sick and suffering is an integral part of her mission" (John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Dolentium Hominum*, n. 1), to bear witness to integral salvation, which is health of soul and body.

[...]

To our suffering brothers and sisters I express my closeness and my appeal to experience illness also as an opportunity of grace to grow spiritually and to participate in Christ's sufferings for the good of the world; and I offer all of you who are committed in the vast field of health, care my encouragement for your precious service. As I pray for the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, *Salus infirmorum*, I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I also extend to your families.

BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 25th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS
15 November 2010

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PASTORAL COMMENT

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines HEALTH as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing; not simply the absence of sickness.' In accordance with this definition, a 'Report on health in the world' (2006) defined health-workers as all those persons who carry out tasks or actions whose principal purpose is to promote this state of wellbeing, to protect and improve health. We might say that we ourselves, in our daily lives, with simple actions, often work for this: the young person who does voluntary work in an NGO, the mother looking after her baby, the son who accompanies his parents to hospital, or the grandmother who turns to her experience of life and traditional wisdom to tend and comfort.... The list would be interminable if we wanted to take into account all the people who work in some way for the health of others.

However, we referred just now to 'health-workers' in the strict sense, to those who undergo a period of professional training or specific qualification. We cannot be unaware that among them, also, there is great diversity: doctors, nurses, people who prepare and serve food, cleaners, those who care for a sick person's family, pharmacists...

This month the Holy Father asks us to pray especially for those who are in contact with, and serve more directly, the sick and elderly in the poorest regions. Why is it necessary to ask the Lord to sustain their efforts? What is happening? What difficulties do they meet?

We can summarise the reasons for this intention in two points:

1. The person who works with the sick and elderly needs to have good health, that is, to have a psychological-physical-spiritual balance which allows an enriching interpersonal relationship, balanced, unconditionally committed, of real service to the other. A sick or elderly person is already, for that very reason, in a more vulnerable state because of his aches and pains and sufferings, because of progressive bodily deterioration, through feelings of anxiety, loneliness and so on. The health-worker has to take into account the person as a whole, with everything that he is experiencing and feeling, in his specific circumstances, and to remember that the person he is dealing with needs not only medical care and expertise, but attention to his psychological and affective demands at particularly difficult moments of his life. Very often, especially in the poorest regions, it is not possible to alleviate pain and suffering, to prevent and cure sicknesses, through the lack of sanitary resources, but it is always possible to offer human warmth, and a sympathetic look.

2. At the present time there are sharp contrasts. On the one hand there are enormous advances in human well-being, great benefits from new medicines and technologies with which to face many diseases, or to improve the quality of life for the elderly, but on the other there are threats of the dehumanisation of medicine, unfair distribution of world resources, and situations of extreme deprivation in the poorest countries. Respect for human life is a universal value, one of the most fundamental and evident principles in all ideologies and cultures. Even though there is no need for intellectual effort to justify it, we are experiencing situations of great injustice. To record just one: 'In the heart of Africa there are four million people who need help. Doctors watch their patients die because they lack even the minimum necessary to save their lives.' (Lea Koyassoum Doumta, Minister for Population and Public Health, Central African Republic.) In many regions of our planet, the political, economic, social and health crises do not allow for investment in the medical field, and health-workers find themselves deprived of all support at whatever level, and subject to constantly greater stress and insecurity. Effectively, the poverty-related diseases (AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria...) are devastating many populations without resources, and the rapid, unforeseen health crises caused by epidemics, natural catastrophes, conflicts are on the increase. The tasks and functions required of health-workers in such adverse circumstances are extremely arduous. May the Lord bless and sustain their efforts!

Sister Antonella Rizzo

Religious of the Daughters of Jesus, obstetrician, working at present in a hospital in Rome

MARCH

GENERAL INTENTION – MARCH

That the whole world may recognize the contribution of women to the development of society.

Every day we learn of further ways in which life is compromised, particularly in its most vulnerable stages. While justice demands that these be decried as a violation of human rights, they must also evoke a positive and proactive response. The recognition and appreciation of God's plan for women in the transmission of life and the nurturing of children is a constructive step in this direction. Beyond this, and given the distinctive influence of women in society, they must be encouraged to embrace the opportunity to uphold the dignity of life through their involvement in education and their participation in political and civic life. Indeed, because they have been gifted by the Creator with a unique "capacity for the other", women have a crucial part to play in the promotion of human rights, for without their voice the social fabric of society would be weakened (cf. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 13).

[...]

It is my sincere hope that your discussions over these next two days will translate into concrete initiatives that safeguard the indispensable role of the family in the integral development of the human person and of society as a whole. The genius of women to mobilize and organize endows them with the skills and motivation to develop ever-expanding networks for sharing experiences and generating new ideas. The accomplishments of WWALF and the UMOFC/WUCWO are an outstanding example of this, and I encourage their members to persevere in their generous service to society. May the sphere of your influence continue to grow at regional, national and international levels for the advancement of human rights based on the strong foundation of marriage and family.

***BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON THE THEME: "LIFE, FAMILY AND DEVELOPMENT:
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS"
(VATICAN, 20-21 MARCH 2009)***

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An important aspect of your reflection during this Year of the Family has been the particular dignity, vocation and mission of women in God's plan. How much the Church in these lands owes to the patient, loving and faithful witness of countless Christian mothers, religious Sisters, teachers, doctors and nurses! How much your society owes to all those women who in different and at times courageous ways have devoted their lives to building peace and fostering love! From the very first pages of the Bible, we see how man and woman, created in the image of God, are meant to complement one another as stewards of God's gifts and partners in communicating his gift of life, both physical and spiritual, to our world. Sadly, this God-given dignity and role of women has not always been sufficiently understood and esteemed. The Church, and society as a whole, has come to realize how urgently we need what the late Pope John Paul II called the "prophetic charism" of women (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29) as bearers of love, teachers of mercy and artisans of peace, bringing warmth and humanity to a world that all too often judges the value



of a person by the cold criteria of usefulness and profit. By its public witness of respect for women, and its defence of the innate dignity of every human person, the Church in the Holy Land can make an important contribution to the advancement of a culture of true humanity and the building of the civilization of love.

BENEDICT XVI
HOMILY - PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND
10 May 2009

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Family life or professional career – must it be a choice?

A personal testimony...

Born in 1953 and brought up with three brothers, nothing in my childhood memories led me to occupations traditional for little girls. Is that what made me choose to go to a College of Agricultural Engineering at the end of secondary school? These colleges were just starting to be open to women. Once again I found myself in an essentially masculine world.

I married, and in due course became the mother of three daughters. This time the tables had turned, and we girls were very much the majority in the house. In their turn they became women, wives or partners, and mothers. And their way of living this three-fold vocation is quite different from mine. In thirty years mental pictures of the role of women and the practical ways of living that go with them have really changed. For example, how to combine family life and a professional career? For my part, coming back from a long period as a volunteer in Africa, with three young children, I chose not to take up professional work again, so as to be more available and to run the household in peace.

My daughters, thirty years later, have all chosen professions that they want to go on with. Like the majority of young French women, they will certainly be able to combine their professional activity with having two or three children! Thanks to maternity leave, the thirty-five hour working week, child benefits and suitable places for little ones in nurseries and schools, they have been able to organise a way of life that would have been unthinkable a few years ago, especially when the two parents were working in different places. The conditions for this success: their respective partners have agreed not always to make their own professional projects the priority, and they take their share of housework and child-care

But there is a delicate balance. The responsibilities of businesses and lawmakers are involved, namely regarding employment-law (obligatory moves or working on Sundays, for example). This is necessary, to enable educated and competent women to make their own contribution to society.

Looking back thirty years, I do not regret my choices. They allowed me to give time to the activities of a certain number of associations, to look after my elderly parents when the time came. This service given by women ought to be recognised by society (taken into account in calculating pensions, for example). But I am glad that each one of my daughters can live her commitment as a mother and serve society through her professional activity.

Let us pray this month, then, with the Holy Father, that women everywhere in the world may be able to bring their contribution to society as a whole. Let us pray especially for women who live in countries or cultures where their capacities are under-valued and their fundamental rights ill-respected.

Claire Ranquet, Apostleship of Prayer Team, France.

**QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL
AND GROUP REFLECTION**

1. Do women have the same rights and duties as men? In what sense, and why, do we affirm this?
2. Are there differences between the role proper to women in society and the role proper to men? What are these?
3. What steps might we take to decrease discrimination against women in our own society and in others?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Lk. 1: 26-38 The Annunciation: Mary's role in the work of salvation
- John 8: 1-11 the woman given her dignity
- Mk. 10:1-11 prohibition of divorce strengthens the rights of women

MISSION INTENTION - MARCH

That the Holy Spirit may grant perseverance to those who suffer discrimination, persecution, or death for the name of Christ, particularly in Asia.



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, THE PATH TO PEACE

1. At the beginning of the new year I offer good wishes to each and all for serenity and prosperity, but especially for peace. Sadly, the year now ending has again been marked by persecution, discrimination, terrible acts of violence and religious intolerance.

My thoughts turn in a special way to the beloved country of Iraq, which continues to be a theatre of violence and strife as it makes its way towards a future of stability and reconciliation. I think of the recent sufferings of the Christian community, and in particular the reprehensible attack on the Syro-Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Baghdad, where on 31 October two priests and over fifty faithful were killed as they gathered for the celebration of Holy Mass. In the days that followed,

other attacks ensued, even on private homes, spreading fear within the Christian community and a desire on the part of many to emigrate in search of a better life. I assure them of my own closeness and that of the entire Church, a closeness which found concrete expression in the recent Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops. The Synod encouraged the Catholic communities in Iraq and throughout the Middle East to live in communion and to continue to offer a courageous witness of faith in those lands.

I offer heartfelt thanks to those Governments which are working to alleviate the sufferings of these, our brothers and sisters in the human family, and I ask all Catholics for their prayers and support for their brethren in the faith who are victims of violence and intolerance. In this context, I have felt particularly appropriate to share some reflections on religious freedom as the path to peace. It is painful to think that in some areas of the world it is impossible to profess one's religion freely except at the risk of life and personal liberty. In other areas we see more subtle and sophisticated forms of prejudice and hostility towards believers and religious symbols. At present, Christians are the religious group which suffers most from persecution on account of its faith. Many Christians experience daily affronts and often live in fear because of their pursuit of truth, their faith in Jesus Christ and their heartfelt plea for respect for religious freedom. This situation is unacceptable, since it represents an insult to God and to human dignity; furthermore, it is a threat to security and peace, and an obstacle to the achievement of authentic and integral human development.[1]

BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE
8 December 2010

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The words of the Lord Jesus may be applied to Christians in the Middle East: "There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). Indeed, even if they are few, they are bearers of the Good News of the love of God for man, love which revealed itself in the Holy Land in the person of Jesus Christ. This Word of salvation, strengthened with the grace of the Sacraments, resounds with particular potency in the places in which, by Divine Providence, it was written, and it is the only Word which is able to break that vicious circle of vengeance, hate, and violence. From a purified heart, in peace with God and neighbour, may intentions and initiatives for peace at local, national, and international levels be born. In these actions, to whose accomplishment the whole international community is called, Christians as full-fledged citizens can and must do their part with the spirit of the Beatitudes, becoming builders of peace and apostles of reconciliation to the benefit of all society.

[...]

Dear brothers and sisters of the Middle East! May the experience of these days assure you that you are never alone, that you are always accompanied by the Holy See and the whole Church, which, having been born in Jerusalem, spread through the Middle East and then the rest of the world.

***BENEDICT XVI
HOMILY FOR THE CLOSING
OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
24 October 2010***

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Many countries, including in Asia, are infatuated with democracy. And they know that the foundation of democracy is respect of the human rights. For this reason, all citizens have the freedom to choose and practice their respective religions. Unfortunately, persecution of particular religious believers remains our nowadays reality. In communist countries, like China and Vietnam, Christianity is hard to thrive. Some other countries refuse Christianity in a more implicit way, such as political discrimination. In recent times, the word Allah to refer to the Christian's God was banned in Malaysia. This prohibition was not easy for the Christians there because that was the only way they know to address their God. Fortunately, this unilateral prohibition was finally revoked.

Meanwhile in Indonesia, where Moslem is the majority, discrimination occurs in almost all aspects of life although the government has never acknowledged it. Here, to be Christian means to be denied access to become state employees or a shining career as lecturer in a state university, and to receive insufficient religious education in state schools. Even, in some regions, religious services are only allowed in church and no worship in the house is permitted.

This is ironical in Indonesia, which is famous for its ideology of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, meaning unity in diversity, when in truth, tolerance among religious followers is nonexistent. In this country, persecution toward the Christians cannot be seen merely as discrimination but also act of hostility. Here is the fact: during 2004-2010, 2.442 churches are destroyed or closed down. Recently, in February 2011, an organized mass brutally attacked Catholic and Pentecost Churches in Temanggung, Central Java.

Lately, especially in Asia, Christian persecution tends to escalate. One of the causes is the wave of radicalism and fundamentalism of other religions. They are suspicious that Christians effortlessly attempt to Christianize others. Given this latent danger, in March 2012, the Church invites us to pray for the persecuted Christian frequently and also for the decreasing of radicalism and fundamentalism. In the midst of this challenge and threat, Christians need to deepen their perseverance and courage to defend their faith. Indeed, the Church, especially in Asia has to find a way of living together as to enable them to guarantee peace and harmony, while defends themselves from radicalism and fundamentalism.

It is indeed a moment of blessing whereby the Church in Asia may experience the truth of the gospel. "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Ptr 4: 14). It is clear that human effort only is not sufficient to face this holy challenge. We need to pray fervently so that the Holy Spirit strengthens those who are discriminated against and victims of persecution and violence because of their faith.

***Gabriel Possenti Sindhunata, SJ
AP National Secretary in Indonesia***

APRIL

GENERAL INTENTION – APRIL

That many young people may hear the call of Christ and follow him in the priesthood and religious life.

The work of carefully encouraging and supporting vocations finds a radiant source of inspiration in those places in the Gospel where Jesus calls his disciples to follow him and trains them with love and care. We should pay close attention to the way that Jesus called his closest associates to proclaim the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 10:9). In the first place, it is clear that the first thing he did was to pray for them: before calling them, Jesus spent the night alone in prayer, listening to the will of the Father (cf. Lk 6:12) in a spirit of interior detachment from mundane concerns. It is Jesus' intimate conversation with the Father which results in the calling of his disciples. Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life are first and foremost the fruit of constant contact with the living God and insistent prayer lifted up to the "Lord of the harvest", whether in parish communities, in Christian families or in groups specifically devoted to prayer for vocations.



At the beginning of his public life, the Lord called some fishermen on the shore of the Sea of Galilee: "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). He revealed his messianic mission to them by the many "signs" which showed his love for humanity and the gift of the Father's mercy. Through his words and his way of life he prepared them to carry on his saving work. Finally, knowing "that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father" (Jn 13:1), he entrusted to them the memorial of his death and resurrection, and before ascending into heaven he sent them out to the whole world with the command: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

It is a challenging and uplifting invitation that Jesus addresses to those to whom he says: "Follow me!". He invites them to become his friends, to listen attentively to his word and to live with him. He teaches them complete commitment to God and to the extension of his kingdom in accordance with the law of the Gospel: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). He invites them to leave behind their own narrow agenda and their notions of self-fulfilment in order to immerse themselves in another will, the will of God, and to be guided by it. He gives them an experience of fraternity, one born of that total openness to God (cf. Mt 12:49-50) which becomes the hallmark of the community of Jesus: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

It is no less challenging to follow Christ today. It means learning to keep our gaze fixed on Jesus, growing close to him, listening to his word and encountering him in the sacraments; it means learning to conform our will to his. This requires a genuine school of formation for all those who would prepare themselves for the ministerial priesthood or the consecrated life under the guidance of the competent ecclesial authorities. The Lord does not fail to call people at every stage of life to share in his mission and to serve the Church in the ordained ministry and in the consecrated life. The Church is "called to safeguard this gift, to esteem it and love it. She is responsible for the birth and development of priestly vocations" (John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 41). Particularly in these times, when the voice of the Lord seems to be drowned out by "other voices" and his invitation to follow him by the gift of one's own life may seem too difficult, every Christian community, every member of the Church, needs consciously to feel responsibility for promoting vocations. It is important to encourage and support those who show clear signs of a call to priestly life and religious consecration, and to enable them to feel the warmth of the whole community as they respond "yes" to God and the Church. I encourage them, in the same words which I addressed to those who have already chosen to enter the seminary: "You have done a good thing. Because people will always have need of God, even in an age marked by technical mastery of the world and globalization: they will always need the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the God who gathers us together in the universal Church in order to

learn with him and through him life's true meaning and in order to uphold and apply the standards of true humanity" (Letter to Seminarians, 18 October 2010).

It is essential that every local Church become more sensitive and attentive to the pastoral care of vocations, helping children and young people in particular at every level of family, parish and associations – as Jesus did with his disciples - to grow into a genuine and affectionate friendship with the Lord, cultivated through personal and liturgical prayer; to grow in familiarity with the sacred Scriptures and thus to listen attentively and fruitfully to the word of God; to understand that entering into God's will does not crush or destroy a person, but instead leads to the discovery of the deepest truth about ourselves; and finally to be generous and fraternal in relationships with others, since it is only in being open to the love of God that we discover true joy and the fulfilment of our aspirations. "Proposing Vocations in the Local Church" means having the courage, through an attentive and suitable concern for vocations, to point out this challenging way of following Christ which, because it is so rich in meaning, is capable of engaging the whole of one's life.

***BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE FOR THE 48th WORLD DAY
OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS
15 November 2010***

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See the full text:

- BENEDICT XVI - MESSAGE FOR THE 48th WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS - 15 November 2010

See more:

- BENEDICT XVI - MESSAGE FOR THE 47th WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS - 13 November 2009

PASTORAL COMMENT

The Lord Jesus said to his apostles 'The harvest is great, but the labourers are few. Pray the Lord of the harvest, then, that he may send labourers into his harvest.' (Lk.10:2)

Today, too, the harvest is great and the labourers are few. In some places in the world we might say that there is no shortage of priests or of religious men and women, that the faithful are well provided for, well supported by enough priests. But the reality is that in the majority of local churches the shortage of men and women especially consecrated to the Lord is very strongly evident; many communities all over the Catholic world do not have pastors who encourage them to live according to the gospel of Jesus Christ; there are priestless parishes in many places; that means that on many Sundays or feast-days the Eucharist is not celebrated in those parishes; the faithful in those parishes do not celebrate the LORD'S SUPPER, do not celebrate CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

There is no substitute for the priest; only he can consecrate the BODY OF JESUS CHRIST in the Eucharist; only he can forgive our sins in the confessional, because Christ himself gave priests that power at the Last Supper.

Religious men and women, deacons and consecrated laity co-operate in the evangelizing work of the universal Church in different ways, helping priests, taking part in the pastoral work of their local churches, and so on; the contemplatives support the Church with their prayer, strengthen our faith with their prayer, and help us to bring the LORD JESUS to every corner of the earth.

Certainly the Lord calls, certainly he is calling now and will never cease to call, but this call needs a response from the man or woman who is called. This response is blocked today by the secularism and materialism that consume our societies – and that is where the Holy Father asks us to intervene. The Church is made up of all the baptised, so we are responsible, laypeople together with our pastors, that the Lord may have enough 'labourers for his harvest.'

His Holiness asks us to pray, in this intention, that many young people may be able to receive Christ's call, and follow him in the priesthood and in religious life, so that there may never be a lack of holy religious, men and women, who may sanctify his Church and us, his children.

***Mr. Fernando Cavada-Guzman, Chilean layman, father and grandfather
Vice-president of Communications,
Serra International***

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What would we say to our son or daughter, or to a friend, who shows a desire to become a religious?
2. What specific actions might we take in our communities to create a favourable environment for the growth of priestly or religious vocations?
3. In what specific ways can we show our support for the vocation of those who have already been called (the seminarians of our diocese, religious in our town or parish, our parish priest, etc.)?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Jer. 1: 4-10 call of the prophet
- Rom. 1: 5-7 Paul made an apostle
- Mk. 1: 16-20 Jesus calls his first disciples

MISSION INTENTION - APRIL

That the risen Christ may be a sign of certain hope for the men and women of the African continent.



"The nations will walk in its light" (Rev 21:24). The goal of the Church's mission is to illumine all peoples with the light of the Gospel as they journey through history towards God, so that in Him they may reach their full potential and fulfillment. We should have a longing and a passion to illumine all peoples with the light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church, so that all may be gathered into the one human family, under God's loving fatherhood.

Here is a message of hope for Africa: we have just listened to the Word of God. It is the message that the Lord of history never tires of renewing for the oppressed and overcome humanity of every era and every land, since the time he revealed to Moses his will for the Israelite slaves of Egypt: "I have witnessed the affliction of my people... and have

heard their cry... so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them... and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3: 7-8). What is this land? Is it not the Kingdom of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, to which all of humanity is called? God's plan does not change. It is the same as that prophesied by Jeremiah, in the magnificent oracles called "The Book of Consolation", from which today the First Reading is taken. It is an announcement of hope for the people of Israel, laid low by the invasion of the army of Nebuchadnezzar, by the devastation of Jerusalem and the Temple and the deportation to Babylonia. A message of joy for the "remainder" of Jacob's sons, which announces a future for them, because the Lord will lead them back to their lands, by a straight and easy road. The persons needing support, like the blind or the crippled, the pregnant woman and the woman in labor, will all experience the strength and tenderness of the Lord: he is a father for Israel, ready to care for it as if it were his firstborn (cf. Jer 31: 7-9).

God's plan does not change. Through the centuries and turns of history, he always aims at the same finality: the Kingdom of liberty and peace for all. And this implies his predilection for those deprived of

freedom and peace, for those violated in their dignity as human beings. We think in particular of our brothers and sisters who in Africa suffer poverty, diseases, injustice, wars and violence, forced migration. These favorite children of the heavenly Father are like the blind man in the Gospel, Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46) at the gates of Jericho. Jesus the Nazarene passed that way. It is the road that leads to Jerusalem, where the Paschal Event will take place, his sacrificial Easter, towards which the Messiah goes for us. It is the road of his exodus which is also ours: the only way that leads to the land of reconciliation, justice and peace. On that road, the Lord meets Bartimaeus, who has lost his sight. Their paths cross, they become a single path. The blind man calls out, full of faith "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!". Jesus replies: "Call him!", and adds: "What do you want me to do for you?". God is light and the Creator of light. Man is the son of light, made to see the light, but has lost his sight, and is forced to beg. The Lord, who became a beggar for us, walks next to him: thirsting for our faith and our love. "What do you want me to do for you?". God knows the answer, but asks; he wants the man to speak. He wants the man to stand up, to find the courage to ask for what is needed for his dignity. The Father wants to hear in the son's own voice the free choice to see the light once again, the light, the reason for Creation. "Master, I want to see!" And Jesus says to him: "Go your way; your faith has saved you". Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way" (Mk 10: 51-52).

Dear Brothers, we give thanks because this "mysterious encounter between our poverty and the greatness" of God was achieved also in the Synodal Assembly for Africa that has ended today. God renewed his call: "Take courage! Get up..." (Mk 10: 49). And the Church in Africa, through its Pastors, having come from all the countries in the continent, from Madagascar and the other islands, has embraced the message of hope and light to walk on the path that leads to the Kingdom of God. "Go your way; your faith has saved you" (Mk 10: 52). Yes, faith in Jesus Christ when properly understood and experienced guides men and peoples to liberty in truth, or, to use the three words of the Synodal theme, to reconciliation, to justice and to peace. Bartimaeus who, healed, follows Jesus along the road, is the image of that humanity that, illuminated by faith, walks on the path towards the promised land. Bartimaeus becomes in turn a witness of the light, telling and demonstrating in the first person about being healed, renewed, regenerated. This is the Church in the world: a community of reconciled persons, operators of justice and peace; "salt and light" amongst the society of men and nations. Therefore the Synod strongly confirmed and manifested this that the Church is the Family of God, in which there can be no divisions based on ethnic, language or cultural groups. Moving witnesses showed us that, even in the darkest moments of human history, the Holy Spirit is at work and transforming the hearts of the victims and the persecutors, that they may know each other as brothers. The reconciled Church is the potent leaven of reconciliation in each country and in the whole African continent.

[...]

"Take courage! Get up"... This is how the Lord of life and hope addresses the Church and peoples of Africa at the end of these weeks of Synodal reflection. Get up, Church in Africa, Family of God, because you are being called by the Heavenly Father whom your ancestors invoked as Creator, before knowing his merciful closeness, revealed in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Set out on the path of a new evangelization with the courage that comes from the Holy Spirit. The urgent action of evangelization which has been spoken about so much in these days also involves an urgent appeal for reconciliation, an indispensable condition for instilling in Africa justice among men and building a fair and lasting peace that respects each individual and people; a peace that requires and is open to the contribution of all people of good will irrespective of their religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds. In such a challenging mission, pilgrim Church in Africa of the third millennium, you are not alone. The whole Catholic Church is near to you with its prayer and active solidarity, and from heaven you are accompanied by the African saints who, with their lives to the point of martyrdom sometimes, testified to the fullness of their faith in Christ.

Courage! Get up, African continent, land that welcomed the Savior of the World when as a child he had to take refuge with Joseph and Mary in Egypt to save his life from the persecution of King Herod. Welcome with renewed enthusiasm the Gospel proclamation so that the Face of Christ may light with its splendor the multiplicity of cultures and languages of your peoples. As it offers the bread of the Word and the Eucharist, the Church also undertakes to operate, with every means at its disposal, to ensure that no African should be deprived of his or her daily bread. For this reason, along with the work of primary importance of evangelization, Christians are actively involved in interventions in favor of promoting humanity.

BENEDICT XVI
HOLY MASS FOR THE CONCLUSION
OF THE SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
25 October 2009

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PASTORAL COMMENT

'More than 2000 participants walk the 5 kms procession to meditate on the Passion and death of Jesus with appropriate songs and prayers. All this takes place on a very sunny day, and the temperature is above 30°C.' So writes friend who is a Canadian Missionary of Africa from a mission in Malawi.

This may sound quite out of the extraordinary to readers in the West, but in fact it's fairly normal in the Church in Africa. Congregations are often large, people will turn up in large numbers for important occasions in all weathers and they are happy to worship for many hours at a stretch.

When I worked in a rural parish in the Zulu-speaking part of South Africa, Easter was the feast which drew the big crowds. The Vigil was an all-night affair with great numbers of confessions followed by a liturgy which could end at dawn the next morning. As for the liturgy, we did it all, always including a good number of adult baptisms. And everything that could be sung, was sung and sung well.

The attraction for the Easter Vigil was partly a matter of inculturation – Zulu people, along with many other African cultures are familiar with the all-night vigil. Vigils are held throughout the night before people are buried. There is much singing, praying and reminiscence about the dead person whose body is present and visible in the house among the mourners. While this is going on inside, a team of men digs the grave outside. Death is not covered up or hidden – it is accepted as part of life and people take time to perform those helpful rituals that all cultures need to deal with this ultimate human mystery.

Hence for the faithful it is perfectly natural to hold a substantial vigil to celebrate the death and the resurrection of the Lord. People have taken to the various parts of the liturgy and its rich symbolism – the fire, the candle, the water. I recall that sometimes non-Catholics would attend the Vigil in order to take away some Catholic holy water!

Paul Ricoeur says that 'Hope, insofar as it is hope of resurrection, is the living contradiction of what it proceeds from and what is placed under the sign of the Cross and death'. The African continent has had more than its fair share of death in its recent history. This might explain the lively faith in the resurrection on display by Christian believers at the liturgical time when we celebrate the overcoming of death by Jesus' undergoing of it and rising from it.

I am not sure if the sociologist of religion Fr Andrew Greeley was thinking about Africa when he wrote the following words, but they certainly apply: 'I think that the core doctrines of Christianity - the incarnation, the resurrection, life after death-these are as strong as ever. In fact, the belief in life after death has increased in this century'. Indeed, the growth of the African Church in the 20th century (in which Greeley was writing), is one of the most spectacular in the history of Christian evangelization. Perhaps this is in part because African Christians have grasped the core of the message – Christ is risen and his resurrection can conquer death in all its forms.

Chris Chatteris, sj
AP National Secretary in South Africa

MAY

GENERAL INTENTION – MAY

That initiatives which defend and uphold the role of the family may be promoted within society.

Work and celebration are closely connected with the lives of families: they condition decisions, influence relations between spouses and between parents and children and affect the relationship of the family with society and with the Church. Sacred Scripture (cf. Gen 1-2) tells us that the family, work and holidays are gifts and blessings to help us to live a fully human life. Daily experience shows that the authentic development of the person includes both the individual, family and community dimensions and functional activities and relations, as well as openness to hope and to unlimited Good.

In our day, unfortunately, the organization of work, conceived of and implemented in terms of market competition and the greatest profit, and the conception of a holiday as an opportunity to escape and to consume commodities, contribute to dispersing the family and the community and spreading an individualistic lifestyle. It is therefore necessary to promote reflection and commitment which aim at reconciling the needs and schedule of work with those of the family. They must also aim at recovering the true meaning of celebration, especially on Sunday, the weekly Easter, the day of the Lord and the day of man, the day of the family, of the community and of solidarity.



BENEDICT XVI

LETTER TO CARDINAL ENNIO ANTONELLI

PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY

ON THE OCCASION OF THE SEVENTH WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES

23 August 2010

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The challenges of present-day society, marked by the centrifugal forces generated especially in urban settings, make it necessary to ensure that families do not feel alone. A small family can encounter difficult obstacles when it is isolated from relatives and friends. The ecclesial community therefore has the responsibility of offering support, encouragement and spiritual nourishment which can strengthen the cohesiveness of the family, especially in times of trial or difficulty. Here parishes have an important role to play, as do the various ecclesial associations, called to cooperate as networks of support and a helping hand for the growth of families in faith.

[...]

Together with passing on the faith and the love of God, one of the greatest responsibilities of families is that of training free and responsible persons. For this reason the parents need gradually to give their children greater freedom, while remaining for some time the guardians of that freedom. If children see that their parents - and, more generally, all the adults around them - live life with joy and enthusiasm, despite all difficulties, they will themselves develop that profound "joy of life" which can help them to overcome wisely the inevitable obstacles and problems which are part of life. Furthermore, when families are not closed in on themselves, children come to learn that every person is worthy of love, and that there is a basic, universal brotherhood which embraces every human being.

[...]

This meeting provides a new impetus for proclaiming the Gospel of the family, reaffirming the strength and identity of the family founded upon marriage and open to the generous gift of life, where children are accompanied in their bodily and spiritual growth. This is the best way to counter a widespread hedonism which reduces human relations to banality and empties them of their authentic value and beauty. To promote the values of marriage does not stand in the way of fully experiencing the happiness that man and women encounter in their mutual love. Christian faith and ethics are not meant to stifle love, but to make it healthier, stronger and more truly free. Human love needs to be purified and to mature if it is to be fully human and the principle of a true and lasting joy (cf. Address at Saint John Lateran, 5 June 2006).

And so I invite government leaders and legislators to reflect on the evident benefits which homes in peace and harmony assure to individuals and the family, the neuralgic center of society, as the Holy See has stated in the Charter of the Rights of the Family. The purpose of laws is the integral good of man, in response to his needs and aspirations. This good is a significant help to society, of which it cannot be deprived, and for peoples a safeguard and a purification. The family is also a school which enables men and women to grow to the full measure of their humanity. The experience of being loved by their parents helps children to become aware of their dignity as children.

***BENEDICT XVI
APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO VALENCIA (SPAIN)
ON OCCASION OF THE FIFTH WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES
8 July 2006***

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PASTORAL COMMENT

This month, in which the World Family Congress is celebrated in Milan, Italy, the Pope's intention seeks to promote initiatives to strengthen the family, which is being attacked in various ways and is deeply wounded.

It is not unreasonable to assert that the problems some people have with drugs, pornography, delinquency and so on, have their origin to a large extent in their families, which did not accept them, love them, educate them, give them the support they needed. All human beings need to feel loved and supported by their parents, and for parents to give them good example and put them on the road to following it. If this is lacking, they feel bad, and don't care what they do, because they do not feel loved, respected, or accepted.

The family is the nucleus, the basis and foundation of society, and so that society may be healthy and prosperous, we need to take care of the family, founded by one man and one woman, that they may teach their children how to be a man or a woman, how to live in society, inculcating good habits in the family. In this way each family will be a leaven of love, a school where people learn how to be builders of peace and justice. Only in this way will society improve little by little and recover from its wounds. Its problems will not be solved if we wait for the solution to come from outside, for 'someone' to bring about change in society. The solution lies in the family itself, that it may change and transform society through its members.

If you are the father of a family, consider that the Lord has given you a great mission with your children. Work for them. Give them good example, taking care over what comes into your home, through magazines, television and so on. Think that you are giving a witness to your children, that they are watching you, and that some day they will copy your good and bad qualities, and will do what you do. Make sure that you are a father who is there, who shares life with his family. Let there be sports and activities together. Respect your wife and treat her with courtesy and love. Be faithful in your marriage, and make your wife and children happy. Take care of your spiritual life, your moral values, and try to build your home on solid foundations: Jesus Christ, justice, truth, respect, honour, patriotism, and so on. Share with your wife in household tasks and the upbringing of your children, forming their consciences properly, showing them clearly what is right and what is wrong. Have clear boundaries and see that your children keep them.

If you are the mother of a family, protect and accept with love, from their conception, the treasure of the children whom God has given you. Show your closeness to each member of your family by your compassion, love, readiness for dialogue, fidelity and respect. If you work outside your home, carry out your double working day with love, because when you come home your duty as mother and wife is waiting for you. If you are a single mother, carry out your mission as an exemplary mother, with dignity. Foster in your children love for brothers and sisters, healthy recreation and culture. Give your children

some responsibility in the home, even while they are little, so that they feel that they are part of the family, and that their work is for everybody's benefit. Know and practise your religion, bring the family together for prayer. Teach them to pray, to love and trust in God and Our Lady, who ought to be present in your home. Keep up family traditions, which unite the family and preserve harmony in your home. Form the children in good habits: order, cleanliness, sincerity, education, patience, and give good example, showing love to others.

If you are a son or daughter, show gratitude to your parents, helping them in whatever ways you can, respecting them, obeying them and showing understanding if they make mistakes. Trust them and talk to them about what is happening to you, so that they can help you. Follow their advice, which is the best, because they are seeking your good. Be a good son or daughter, a good brother or sister, so that when you grow up you can start a good family of your own.

Pray to the Lord that each family may be a light in the world and in society, an example for everyone, that it may be a leaven of love, understanding and respect.

Maria Carmen Celayeta

Mother, writer and member of the Apostleship of Prayer in Mexico

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What is the role or what are the duties of each member of my family, in my home? Does everybody help with other people's duties, at certain times?
2. Thinking about the difficulties that sometimes crop up at home, what specific initiative could I take to improve the atmosphere and help the family to get on together?
3. How can I encourage my society to support and strengthen the family?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Phil.2: 1-4 attitudes for living family life
- 1 Cor.7: 1-11 advice for married people
- Lk.15:11 Parable of the merciful father: forgiveness, key to family life
- Mt.22: 34-40 Love, foundation of the family

MISSION INTENTION - MAY

That Mary, Queen of the World and Star of Evangelization, may accompany all missionaries in proclaiming her Son Jesus.



mentioned: she is in fact, in Christ, the first fruits and model of "those who love him [God]" (Rm 8: 28).

Thus, once again, we can contemplate Mary's place in the saving plan of God, that "purpose" which we find in the Second Reading, taken from the Letter to the Romans. Here the Apostle Paul expresses in two verses, unusually dense with meaning, the synthesis of what human life is from a meta-historical viewpoint: a parabola of salvation that starts from God and returns to him; a parabola entirely motivated and governed by his love. This is a salvific design totally permeated by divine freedom, which nonetheless awaits a fundamental contribution by human freedom: the creature's corresponds to the Creator's love. And it is here, in this space of human freedom, that we perceive the presence of the Virgin Mary, without her ever having been explicitly

The predestination of Mary is inscribed in the predestination of Jesus, as likewise is that of every human person. The "here I am" of the Mother faithfully echoes the "here I am" of the Son (cf. Heb 10: 6), as does the "here I am" of all adoptive children in the Son, that of us all, precisely.

[...]

And then, obviously, there is your love for Our Lady. Indeed, we are here today to commemorate a great act of faith made by your ancestors a century ago when they entrusted their lives to the Mother of Christ, choosing her to be the most important Patroness of the Island. They could not have known then that the 20th century was to be a very difficult century but it was certainly in that consecration to Mary that they subsequently found the strength to face the difficulties that arose, especially with the two World Wars. It could only be like this. Your Island, dear friends of Sardinia, could have no other protectress than Our Lady. She is the Mother, Daughter and Wife par excellence: "Sa Mama, Fiza, Isposa de su Segnore", as you like to sing. She is the Mother who loves, protects, advises, consoles and gives life so that life may be born and endure. She is the Daughter who honours her family, is ever attentive to the needs of her brothers and sisters and is prompt in making her home beautiful and welcoming; she is the Wife capable of faithful, patient love, of sacrifice and of hope. In Sardinia at least 350 churches and shrines are dedicated to Mary. A people of mothers is reflected in that humble girl from Nazareth who with her "yes" enabled the Word to become flesh.

I well know that Mary is in your hearts. A hundred years later, let us thank her today for her protection and renew our trust in her, recognizing her as the "Star of the New Evangelization" at whose school we may learn how to bring Christ the Saviour to the men and women of our time.

May Mary help you to bring Christ to families, little domestic churches and cells of society, which today more than ever are in need of both spiritual and social trust and support. May she help you to find appropriate pastoral strategies to ensure that Christ is encountered by young people who by their nature bring new dynamism but often fall prey to the widespread nihilism, thirsting for truth and ideals precisely when they seem to deny them. May she render you capable of evangelizing the world of work, the economy and politics which need a new generation of committed lay Christians who can seek competently and with moral rigour sustainable solutions of development. In all these aspects of Christian commitment you can always count on the guidance and support of the Blessed Virgin. Let us therefore entrust ourselves to her maternal intercession.

Mary is the harbour, refuge and protection for the Sardinian people who have within them the strength of oak. When the storm has passed the oak stands strong; fires rage and it sends out new shoots; the drought comes and it wins through once again. Let us therefore renew joyfully our consecration to such a caring Mother. I am sure that generations of Sardinians will continue to climb to the Shrine at Bonaria to invoke the Virgin's protection. Those who entrust themselves to Our Lady of Bonaria, a merciful and powerful Mother, will never be disappointed. May Mary Queen of Peace and Star of Hope intercede for us. Amen!

BENEDICT XVI
HOMILY PASTORAL VISIT TO CAGLIARI - SARDINIA
7 September 2008

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Usually, missionaries are sent out in groups of two or more. This is how Jesus sent out the first apostles and disciples. A layperson may be accompanied by a spouse. Religious men and women go on mission with members of their congregation to Zambia or Zimbabwe, to Korea or China. But wherever they are sent, they never go alone.

The Holy Spirit guides them, the Good News of the Gospel is the treasure they share. And, as we pray this month with the Pope, Mary too accompanies all missionaries.

Mary accompanied and watched over Jesus from the moment of the Annunciation, from his birth in Bethlehem, and during his hidden life in Nazareth. She was present at the first miracle of Cana, the first mystery of Light. She was with Jesus on the road to Calvary as the fourth station of the Cross recalls, and she stayed with her Son at the foot of the Cross.

While Mary was not one of the apostles Jesus sent to the ends of the earth to teach all nations, she in the Upper Room with the apostles when they were preparing to take up their mission. She prayerfully waited with them for the coming of the Spirit to empower them. Pope Paul VI describes her strong presence in these words: "On the morning of Pentecost she watched over with her prayer the beginning of evangelization prompted by the Holy Spirit: may she be the Star of the evangelization ever renewed

which the Church ever docile to her Lord's command, must promote and accomplish, especially in these times which are difficult but full of hope" (On Evangelization in the Modern World, No. 82).

So this month, we pray that every missionary feels the guiding, compassionate, loving presence of Mary. Christians have known for 2000 years that one really does not understand or have Jesus Christ in their lives unless they honor and respect his mother Mary. As Mary brought Jesus to birth in our world 2000 years ago, once again, may she, the Star of Evangelization accompany and assist missionaries today in bringing Jesus to birth in the hearts of men and women today.

Rev. Peter Schineller, S.J.

Archivist of the New York Province of the Society of Jesus

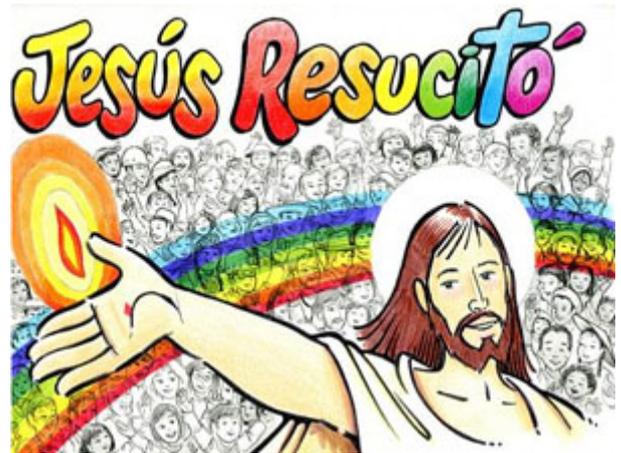
JUNE

GENERAL INTENTION – JUNE

That believers may recognize in the Eucharist the living presence of the Risen One who accompanies them in daily life.

The Eucharist is also a model of the Christian journey which must shape our existence. It is Christ who convokes us to gather together, to constitute the Church, his Body, in the midst of the world.

To be admitted to the twofold table of the Word and the Bread, we must first receive God's forgiveness, the gift which sustains us on our daily journey, restores the divine image within us and shows us the point to which we are loved. Then, just as in Luke's Gospel he addressed Simon the Pharisee, Jesus continuously addresses us through Scripture: "I have something to say to you" (7: 40). Indeed, every word of Scripture is a word of life for us that we must listen to with great attention. In a particular way, the Gospel constitutes the heart of the Christian message, the total revelation of the divine mysteries. In his Son, the Word made



flesh, God has told us everything. In his Son, God has revealed his Face to us as Father, a Face of love, a Face of hope. He has shown us the way to happiness and joy. During the consecration, an especially important moment of the Eucharist because in it we commemorate Christ's sacrifice, you are called to contemplate the Lord Jesus, like St Thomas: "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20: 28). After receiving the Word of God, after having been nourished by his Body, let yourselves be inwardly transformed and receive your mission from him. Indeed, he sends you into the world to be messengers of his peace and witnesses of his message of love. Do not be afraid to proclaim Christ to the young people of your age. Show them that Christ does not hamper your life or your freedom; show them that, on the contrary, he gives you true life, that he sets you free to fight evil and to make something beautiful of your life.

Do not forget that the Sunday Eucharist is a loving encounter with the Lord that we cannot do without. When you recognize him "at the breaking of bread", like the disciples at Emmaus, you will become his companions. He will help you to grow and to give the best of yourselves. Remember that in the Bread of the Eucharist, Christ is really, totally and substantially present. It is therefore in the mystery of the Eucharist, at Mass and during silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, that you will meet him in a privileged way. By opening your very being and your whole life under the gaze of Christ, you will not be crushed - quite the contrary: you will discover that you are infinitely loved. You will receive the power that you need in order to build your lives and to make the choices that present themselves to you every day. Before the Lord, in the silence of your hearts, some of you may feel called to follow him in a more radical way in the priesthood or the consecrated life. Do not be afraid to listen to this call and to respond with joy. As I said at the inauguration of my Pontificate, God takes nothing away from those who give themselves to him. On the contrary, he gives them everything. He comes to draw out the best that is in each one of us, so that our lives can truly flourish.

BENEDICT XVI
VIDEO-MESSAGE TO YOUNG PARTICIPANTS
IN THE 49th INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS
IN QUÉBEC (CANADA)
21 June 2008

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said that the greatest poverty of our time is not material poverty but loneliness. There are so many people who feel themselves, or who are, very lonely, often overcome by sadness and despair. Where can they find a friend? Today there are numerous social networks on the internet, where it is easy to have hundreds of 'friends', even if in reality they may be completely unknown. On the web there are also services for finding friends or partners, selected according to the personal tastes of the 'surfers'... which sometimes give results in the shape of real meetings between people.

We need, and we seek, to be connected. It is a basic human condition, from our first experiences in the womb, when Daddy taps on Mummy's belly with his finger, and we kick back.... right up to the dramatic experience of the Chilean miners in 2010, lost and out of contact for seventeen anxious days, 700 metres underground, before being found.

We might say that Christian faith is also fundamentally a meeting, a connection: a connection both with the risen Christ and among ourselves, the members of his community.

The Pope's request for prayer this month reminds us of a consoling reality: in every Eucharist, regardless of the devotion or ability of the priest who is celebrating, the risen Christ is present for us. There, as in a privileged place, we really can connect with him, and we form a celebrating community. In the light of God's Word, and under the veil of the humble, everyday sacramental signs, the generous and approachable person of the risen Jesus comes to meet us. For the people of God, pilgrims amidst the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of today's world, the Eucharist becomes a source and a central focus of this connectedness that we long for.

As Christians we are invited each Sunday, if possible each day, to come to this meeting. Let us ask the grace to recognise the Lord's smiling face in every Eucharist and to strengthen ourselves with his body given up for each one of us. There we can be sure that when the Eucharist is over He will continue to accompany us in our daily life, 'all days, even to the end of the world.' (Matt. 28: 20)

Claudio Barriga, sj
Director General of the Apostleship of Prayer

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What aspect or part of the Mass helps me most to feel the presence of Jesus?
2. Do I go to weekly Mass through conviction and personal choice, even though I 'don't feel like it'? Do I go even if the priest seems not very motivating to me?
3. In what way do I feel that the Risen Jesus goes with me when I leave the church, accompanying me in my daily life?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Lk.22: 14-22 Institution of the Eucharist
- Mt.28: 16-20 I shall be with you all days
- Lk.24: 13-35 The disciples at Emmaus: the Risen Jesus journeys with us

MISSION INTENTION - JUNE

That Christians in Europe may rediscover their true identity and participate with greater enthusiasm in the proclamation of the Gospel.



From this place, as a messenger of the Gospel sealed by the blood of Peter and James, I raise my eyes to the Europe that came in pilgrimage to Compostela. What are its great needs, fears and hopes? What is the specific and fundamental contribution of the Church to that Europe which for half a century has been moving towards new forms and projects? Her contribution is centred on a simple and decisive reality: God exists and he has given us life. He alone is absolute, faithful and unending love, that infinite goal that is glimpsed behind the good, the true and the beautiful things of this world, admirable indeed, but insufficient for the human heart. Saint Teresa of Jesus understood this when she wrote: "God alone suffices".

Tragically, above all in nineteenth century Europe, the conviction grew that God is somehow man's antagonist and an enemy of his freedom. As a result, there was an attempt to obscure the true biblical faith in the God who sent into the world his Son Jesus Christ, so that no one should perish but that all might have eternal life (cf. Jn 3:16).

The author of the Book of Wisdom, faced with a paganism in which God envied or despised humans, puts it clearly: how could God have created all things if he did not love them, he who in his infinite fullness, has need of nothing (cf. Wis 11:24-26)? Why would he have revealed himself to human beings if he did not wish to take care of them? God is the origin of our being and the foundation and apex of our freedom, not its opponent. How can mortal man build a firm foundation and how can the sinner be reconciled with himself? How can it be that there is public silence with regard to the first and essential reality of human life? How can what is most decisive in life be confined to the purely private sphere or banished to the shadows? We cannot live in darkness, without seeing the light of the sun. How is it then that God, who is the light of every mind, the power of every will and the magnet of every heart, be denied the right to propose the light that dissipates all darkness? This is why we need to hear God once again under the skies of Europe; may this holy word not be spoken in vain, and may it not be put at the service of purposes other than its own. It needs to be spoken in a holy way. And we must hear it in this way in ordinary life, in the silence of work, in brotherly love and in the difficulties that years bring on.

Europe must open itself to God, must come to meet him without fear, and work with his grace for that human dignity which was discerned by her best traditions: not only the biblical, at the basis of this order, but also the classical, the medieval and the modern, the matrix from which the great philosophical, literary, cultural and social masterpieces of Europe were born.

This God and this man were concretely and historically manifested in Christ. It is this Christ whom we can find all along the way to Compostela for, at every juncture, there is a cross which welcomes and points the way. The cross, which is the supreme sign of love brought to its extreme and hence both gift and pardon, must be our guiding star in the night of time. The cross and love, the cross and light have been synonymous in our history because Christ allowed himself to hang there in order to give us the supreme witness of his love, to invite us to forgiveness and reconciliation, to teach us how to overcome evil with good. So do not fail to learn the lessons of that Christ whom we encounter at the crossroads of our journey and our whole life, in whom God comes forth to meet us as our friend, father and guide. Blessed Cross, shine always upon the lands of Europe!

Allow me here to point out the glory of man, and to indicate the threats to his dignity resulting from the privation of his essential values and richness, and the marginalization and death visited upon the weakest and the poorest. One cannot worship God without taking care of his sons and daughters; and man cannot be served without asking who his Father is and answering the question about him. The Europe of science and technology, the Europe of civilization and culture, must be at the same time a Europe open to transcendence and fraternity with other continents, and open to the living and true God, starting with the living and true man. This is what the Church wishes to contribute to Europe: to be watchful for God and for man, based on the understanding of both which is offered to us in Jesus Christ.

[...]

May Saint James, the companion of the Lord, obtain abundant blessings for Galicia and the other peoples of Spain, elsewhere in Europe and overseas, wherever the Apostle is a sign of Christian identity and a promoter of the proclamation of Christ. Amen!

BENEDICT XVI
HOMILY ON THE OCCASION
OF THE COMPOSTELIAN JUBILEE YEAR
6 November 2010

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PASTORAL COMMENT

For almost two thousand years the Christian faith has been at work in Europe. It is at the heart of the Roman empire – in the city of Rome itself – that the apostles Peter and Paul gave an ultimate witness to the dead and risen Christ by their martyrdom. A long history began then, made of glorious pages and dark hours.

The missionaries travelled all over Europe, and have made this continent a soil in which Christianity is deeply rooted. Great figures may be recalled: Benedict, Columbanus, Cyril and Methodius, for example. Later, a great missionary fervour urged European men and women to leave their native land to proclaim Jesus Christ at the other end of the world.

But Christianity in Europe has also passed through division and fratricidal violence, misunderstanding and persecutions. It was necessary for it to go through these trials. Generation after generation, the Christians of Europe have had to turn back and listen to the One who said to his apostles that he was with them until the end of times.

Today Christianity in Europe is experiencing a time of crisis. Many Europeans are formed in theology and read the Bible, but a still greater number have lost their Christian roots. Many signs indicate the presence of a spiritual thirst, but many parishes are emptying. Many Christians live their baptism as deep personal engagement, but there is a perceptible resistance to proclaiming the gospel.

Christians in Europe find themselves at a very particular moment in their long history. They are heirs to a past, but they are not prisoners of this past. Their history is not a patrimony to grasp, but rather a gift to receive, to live better God's 'today'. Their identity is to be found in a relationship to history open to God who is, who was and who is to come. How can the gospel be brought into a world where the expansion of technology has produced new moral questions? How can the gospel be brought into a world where populations of very diverse origins – and especially of different religious traditions – rub shoulders in everyday life? How can the gospel be brought into a world where the relationship to authority is transformed?

Today, when the world is experiencing profound upheavals, Christians in Europe are invited to rediscover the richness of the gift which has been given to them in Jesus Christ, and to learn afresh how to give to others what they themselves have received. Today, as throughout the two thousand years in which the Christian experience has moulded Europe, the Spirit is at work! He is opening new ways of life. Let us accept his presence and set off on the journey!

Fr. Antoine Kerhuel, sj
Counselor and Assistant to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus.

JULY

GENERAL INTENTION - JULY

That everyone may have work in safe and secure conditions.

32. The significant new elements in the picture of the development of peoples today in many cases demand new solutions. These need to be found together, respecting the laws proper to each element and in the light of an integral vision of man, reflecting the different aspects of the human person, contemplated through a lens purified by charity. Remarkable convergences and possible solutions will then come to light, without any fundamental component of human life being obscured.



The dignity of the individual and the demands of justice require, particularly today, that economic choices do not cause disparities in wealth to increase in an excessive and morally unacceptable manner[83], and that we continue to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone. All things considered, this is also required by “economic logic”. Through the systemic increase of social inequality, both within a single country and between the populations of different countries (i.e. the massive increase in relative poverty), not only does social cohesion suffer, thereby placing democracy at risk, but so too does the economy, through the progressive erosion of “social capital”: the network of relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules, all of which are indispensable for any form of civil coexistence.

Economic science tells us that structural insecurity generates anti-productive attitudes wasteful of human resources, inasmuch as workers tend to adapt passively to automatic mechanisms, rather than to release creativity. On this point too, there is a convergence between economic science and moral evaluation. Human costs always include economic costs, and economic dysfunctions always involve human costs.

[...]

63. No consideration of the problems associated with development could fail to highlight the direct link between poverty and unemployment. In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or “because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family”[143]. For this reason, on 1 May 2000 on the occasion of the Jubilee of Workers, my venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II issued an appeal for “a global coalition in favour of ‘decent work’”[144], supporting the strategy of the International Labour Organization. In this way, he gave a strong moral impetus to this objective, seeing it as an aspiration of families in every country of the world. What is meant by the word “decent” in regard to work? It means work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labour; work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves

enough room for rediscovering one's roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living.

BENEDICT XVI
ENCYCLICAL LETTER
CARITAS IN VERITATE
29 June 2009

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PASTORAL COMMENT

One day about a year ago a friend asked me what time I went to work each day. I hesitated in answering, because I had to recall what my "work" was – simply because I didn't view the activity I did each day so much as "work" but more as what I "did." The word "work" gave a negative overtone to my activity as pastor of a parish and director of Catholic campus ministry at a state university.

I guess work gets its bad image from the story of the banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden, and that they had to toil as a result of the fall. Does that mean that prior to the fall they didn't have to harvest food from trees? That they didn't have to prepare the meat prior to cooking it? That they didn't have to care for cleanliness, or "take out the garbage"? Of course they did I am not sure what they called it before the fall but afterwards it has that awful name "work." What's the difference? Why does work have that overtone of burden? A necessary evil?

Perhaps the difference is the change in our viewpoint. If we are more aware of what we do not have, then work becomes the unfortunate necessity to eliminate that want – a want that will never be fully satisfied. We become work-weary striving to achieve things, because of our sense of our lack. That bite of the apple shifts our eyes from real appreciation and joy in what we have to what isn't, and perhaps dulls our appreciation of what we do have. In fact, Genesis begins with God working for six days – and resting on the seventh enjoying what He had done. His "work" was not a burden, but rather an enjoyment of creating something new, enjoyment from giving of Himself. Work is not bad, rather made in the image and likeness of God, we can cooperate in God's creative work.

Certainly we all have needs, some more than others. It would be naïve to deny that. Some periods of our lives are more burdensome than others, demanding more effort and energy from us, and at times perhaps asking more than we think we can do. In such times work can seem negative, a burden as we are overwhelmed by what we need. And even in "good times" our culture points out subtly what we don't have. Each ad in a newspaper or on television plays on the presumption that you do not have something and what they offer is something you need. (Have you ever seen an ad simply complimenting on what you are or have?)

Let us ask the Lord to teach us to grow our ability to be more appreciative of what we have: our life, our talents, people important to us, and riches that are only important to ourselves. Then from that knowledge we can continue with God in the ongoing process of creation, or better "re-creation" for the benefit of all.

We pray this month with the Holy Father that everyone may have work, and that they may live in with joy, in safe and secure conditions.

Thomas McClain, sj
General Treasurer of the Society of Jesus

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What are the consequences that a family suffers when the adults cannot find work?
2. Do we think of our work as a way of collaborating in God's work? In what way do I express this?
3. Does the daily morning offering of my life help me to do my work better? How?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Gen. 3: 17-19 Work is hard
- 2 Thess. 3: 6-15 Paul on work
- John 5: 17-18 My Father works and I work
- Mt. 21: 28-32 Parable of the two sons

MISSION INTENTION - JULY

That Christian volunteers in mission territories may witness to the love of Christ.



Thanks be to God, many people consider it an honour to engage in volunteer service to individuals, groups and organizations, or to respond to specific needs concerning the common good. This kind of involvement is first of all an occasion for personal growth and for active and responsible participation in the life of society. The willingness to take up volunteer work can have various motivations. Frequently it is simply born of a desire to do something meaningful and helpful, and out of a desire for new experiences. Young people rightly and naturally also discover in volunteer work a source of joy, positive experiences and genuine camaraderie in

carrying out a worthwhile project alongside others. Often these personal ideas and initiatives are linked to a practical love of neighbour; the individual thus becomes part of a wider community of support. I would like to express my gratitude and heartfelt thanks for the remarkable "culture of volunteerism" existing in Austria. I wish to thank every woman and every man, all the young people and all the children – the volunteer work carried out by children is at times impressive; we need only think of the activity of the Sternsinger at Christmastime. I would also like to express gratitude for the efforts, large and small, which often go unnoticed. Thank you and Vergelt's Gott [May God reward you!] for your contribution to building a "civilization of love" at the service of everyone and the betterment of the nation. Love of neighbour is not something that can be delegated; the State and the political order, properly concerned with the relief of the needy and the provision of social services, cannot take its place. Love of neighbour always demands a voluntary personal commitment, and the State, of course, should provide the conditions which make this possible. Thanks to such involvement, assistance maintains a human dimension and does not become depersonalized. Volunteers like yourselves, then, are not "stopgaps" in the social fabric, but people who truly contribute to giving our society a humane and Christian face.

Young people especially long to have their abilities and talents “awakened and discovered”. Volunteers want to be asked, they want to be told: “I need you” - “You can do it!” How good it feels to hear words like these! In their human simplicity, they unwittingly point us to the God who has called each of us into being and given us a personal task, the God who needs us and awaits our response. Jesus called men and women, and gave them the courage needed to embark on a great undertaking, one to which, by themselves, they would never have dared to aspire. To allow oneself to be called, to make a decision and then to set out on a path - without the usual questions about whether it is useful or profitable - this attitude will naturally bring healing in its wake. The saints have shown us this path by their lives. It is a fascinating and thrilling path, a path of generosity and, nowadays, one which is much needed. To say “yes” to volunteering to help others is a decision which is liberating; it opens our hearts to the needs of others, to the requirements of justice, to the defence of life and the protection of creation. Volunteer work is really about the heart of the Christian image of God and man: love of God and love of neighbour.

Dear Volunteers, Ladies and Gentlemen. Volunteer work reflects gratitude for, and the desire to share with others, the love that we ourselves have received. In the words of Duns Scotus, *Deus vult condiligentes* – God wants persons who love together with him. Seen in this light, unremunerated service has much to do with God’s grace. A culture which would calculate the cost of everything, forcing human relationships into a strait jacket of rights and duties, is able to realize, thanks to the countless people who freely donate their time and service to others, that life is an unmerited gift. For all the many different and even contradictory reasons which motivate people to volunteer their services, all are ultimately based on a profound solidarity born of “gratuitousness”. It was as a free gift that we received life from our Creator, it was as a free gift that we were set free from the blind alley of sin and evil, it was as a free gift that we were given the Spirit with his many gifts. “Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends”. “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”. By our commitment to volunteer work, we freely pass on what we ourselves have received. This “inner logic” of gratuitousness goes beyond strict moral obligation.

Without volunteer service, society and the common good could not, cannot and will not endure. A readiness to be at the service of others is something which surpasses the calculus of outlay and return: it shatters the rules of a market economy. The value of human beings cannot be judged by purely economic criteria. Without volunteers, then, no state can be built up. A society’s progress and worth constantly depend on people who do more than what is strictly their duty.

Ladies and Gentlemen! Volunteer work is a service to human dignity, inasmuch as men and women are created in the image and likeness of God. As Irenaeus of Lyons says: “The glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God”. Nicholas of Cusa, in his treatise on the vision of God went on to develop this insight: “Since the eye is where love is found, I know that you love me... Your gaze, O Lord, is love... By gazing upon me, you, the hidden God, enable me to catch a glimpse of you... Your gaze bestows life... Your gaze is creative”. God’s gaze – the gaze of Jesus fills us with God’s love. Some ways of looking at others can be meaningless or even contemptuous. There are looks that reveal esteem and express love. Volunteer workers have regard for others; they remind us of the dignity of every human being and they awaken enthusiasm and hope. Volunteer workers are guardians and advocates of human rights and human dignity.

Jesus’ gaze is connected with another way of seeing others. In the Gospel the words: “He saw him and passed by” are said of the priest and the Levite who see the man lying half-dead on the wayside, yet do not come to his help (Lk 10:31-2). There are people who see, but pretend not to see, who are faced with human needs yet remain indifferent. This is part of the coldness of our present time. In the gaze of others, and particularly of the person who needs our help, we experience the concrete demands of Christian love. Jesus Christ does not teach us a spirituality “of closed eyes”, but one of “alertness”, one which entails an absolute duty to take notice of the needs of others and of situations involving those whom the Gospel tells us are our neighbours. The gaze of Jesus, what “his eyes” teach us, leads to

human closeness, solidarity, giving time, sharing our gifts and even our material goods. For this reason, “those who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern... This heart sees where love is needed, and acts accordingly”. Yes, “I have to become like someone in love, someone whose heart is open to being shaken up by another’s need. Then I find my neighbour or - better – then I am found by him”.

Finally, the commandment of love for God and neighbour (cf. Mt 22:37-40; Lk 10:27) reminds us that it is through our love of neighbour that we Christians honour God himself. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). If Jesus himself is present in the concrete man or woman whom we encounter, then unremunerated service can bring us to an experience of God. Sharing in human situations and needs leads to a “new” and meaningful kind of togetherness. In this way, volunteer work can help bring people out of their isolation and make them part of a community.

To conclude, I would like to mention the power of prayer and its importance for everyone engaged in charitable work. Praying to God sets us free from ideologies or a sense of hopelessness in the face of endless needs. “Even in their bewilderment and failure to understand the world about them, Christians continue to believe in the ‘goodness and loving kindness of God’ (Tit 3:4). Immersed like everyone else in the dramatic complexity of historical events, they remain unshakably certain that God is our Father and loves us, even when his silence remains incomprehensible”.

Dear members and volunteer workers of charitable organizations in Austria, Ladies and Gentlemen! Whenever people do more than their simple duty in professional life and in the family – and even doing this well calls for great strength and much love – , and whenever they commit themselves to helping others, putting their precious free time at the service of man and his dignity, their hearts expand. Volunteers do not understand the term “neighbour” in the literal meaning of the word; for them, it includes those who are far away, those who are loved by God, and those who, with our help, need to experience the work of redemption accomplished by Christ. The other, whom Christ’s Gospel calls our “neighbour”, thus becomes our privileged partner as we face the pressures and constraints of the world in which we live. Anyone who takes seriously the “priority” of his neighbour lives and acts in accordance with the Gospel and shares in the mission of the Church, which always looks at the whole person and wants everyone to experience the love of God. The Church fully supports this valuable service that you offer. I am convinced the volunteers of Austria will continue to be a source of great blessing and I assure you of my prayers. Upon all of you I invoke the joy of the Lord which is our strength (cf. Neh 8:10). May God in his goodness be ever close to you and guide you constantly by the help of his grace.

***BENEDICT XVI
MEETING WITH VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATIONS
Wiener Konzerthaus, Vienna
9 September 2007***

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Some key-notes of Christian voluntary service.

By a ‘Christian volunteer’ we mean a person who devotes part of his or her time, energy or property to collaborating in a cause, in a free and unpaid way. In our day there has been an increase in this form of service, in a society which asks for action, tired of so many empty words.

We might say that voluntary service has always existed in the Church’s tradition, even if under different names. We can also say that every Christian is called to be always a ‘volunteer’ for the love of Christ, intent on serving his or her brothers and sisters. This is true in many of our parishes and institutions: in

tasks within the Church, in help for the most needy, in the education of children, in catechists, visitors of the sick, solidarity-groups, liturgical choirs, and so on.

What is specific in a Christian volunteer is the following of Christ, who inspires and motivates the service. A non-Christian volunteer may carry out tasks very similar to ours, maybe technically done better, but will not act out of the motivation that inspires us, imitation of Christ and his Heart, which is loving and welcoming to everyone.

Claudio Barriga, S.J.

We share with you a testimony that comes from prison ministry in India, taken from a Catholic website: <http://thecsf.org/csf/2011/06/07/catholic-volunteers-impress-jail-officials/>

***Catholic volunteers impress jail officials
June 7, 2011***

A senior official at a jail in the northeast of the country says he would join the Catholic prison ministry after seeing the "benevolent" work of its volunteers.

"What prison ministry volunteers do is quite bold and I appreciate their benevolence," says P. K. Saikia, superintendent of Guwahati's federal prison.

He told a group of visiting prison ministry volunteers that he only came to realize how much they worked for prisoners' welfare last January when they invited him to address their regional meeting.

Saikia said it gave him the opportunity to read the ministry's aims and objectives.

Convinced of the volunteers' impact on prisoners, he sought permission from the Inspector General of Assam for the volunteers to visit the prison four times a month instead of just once.

Saikia said he would like to join the prison ministry after his retirement and give the movement a boost in northeastern India.

"I am sure the ministry can also do well in other states in the region, he added.

Saikia said his current task is "very different" and tough as Guwahati prison houses top terrorist leaders as well as petty thieves.

He said frequent visits would help volunteers understand prisoners better.

"If we take steps according to the needs of the inmates we will be able to reach our desired goal," added Saikia, who has spent 30 years as a prison official.

He says only around 200 of the 783 convicts in Guwahati prison are truly criminal at heart. "Others are forced into crime. Money can do anything," he lamented.

AUGUST

GENERAL INTENTION - AUGUST

That prisoners may be treated with justice and respect for their human dignity.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

1. My purpose in visiting this institution for social rehabilitation is to show the love and concern of Peter's Successor for all of you, those of you here present, and all those deprived of liberty.

[...]

This morning I want to share with you some reflections on the Word of God, with the sole desire that they may light up your hopes and longings, and alleviate your sorrows and disappointments. I know that you find yourselves in a difficult and painful situation. The Pope, who is with you each day in his thoughts and in his prayer, entreats God's help for you. May His grace and favour support you even in the midst of the limitations that your daily life brings.

2. Jesus says to us in the Gospel: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.' (Mt.11: 28-30). That is the Lord's constant call to all men and women, and particularly to those to whom he wishes to reveal the salvific meaning of suffering.

Meeting you, dear brothers and sisters, moves me deeply. I can imagine how many things disturb your hearts, and how many unfulfilled desires fill them with pain and nostalgia. As elder brother in Christ, my wish would be to be able to share with each one of you an intimate and unhurried conversation in which we could have a dialogue of hope and love, going over personal experiences, past frustrations, the plans which give encouragement for the future, and, particularly, the present situation of your families. I am certain that, together with the richness of your feelings, I should discover the deep humanity hidden within each one of you. I know that you would show me what each one has within. Unfortunately, circumstances do not allow us to share even a few minutes, but I want you to receive my words as if they were spoken to each one of you individually.

Christ is the only one who can give meaning to our lives. In Him is to be found peace, serenity and complete liberation, because He saves us from the radical slavery, the cause of all others, which is sin, and inspires in our hearts the yearning for true liberty, fruit of God's grace, which heals and renews what is deepest in the human person.

The liberty which Christ offers us, begins inside a human being, declares itself above all in the moral order; there where egoism, hatred, violence and disorder have their roots. Christ has come to redeem people from the sin which deprives them of their freedom: 'Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin' (Jn.8: 34), Jesus says in the Gospel. And it is from that slavery that He wants to free all of us human beings.

There is no one who does not need Christ's liberation, because there is no one who has not been, who is not, to some extent, prisoner of himself and his passions, in some more or less serious way. We all need conversion and repentance; we all need Christ's saving grace, which He offers freely, with full hands. He waits only for us to say, like the prodigal son, 'I will arise and go to my Father's house' (Lk.15: 18).

3. The doors of God's house are always open. In it Christ makes himself present through the Word and the sacraments. All through the centuries the Church has carried out patiently, but with determination, her work as Mother and Mistress, to make the institutions and principles which regulate life in society more humane. Who can be unaware of the positive influence that the gospel message has exercised over the centuries in defending and promoting greater respect for the dignity of the prisoner as person, as child of God?

In the history of humanity – as I have already said on my visit to the prison in Rome – 'there has been much progress in this field, but certainly much still remains to be done. The Church, as interpreter of Christ's message, appreciates and encourages the efforts of those who devote themselves generously to changing the prison system in the direction of full respect for the rights and dignity of the person' (Homily in the Rebibbia Prison, Rome, n.3, 27 December 1983: Teachings of John Paul II, VI, 2 (1983) 1449s).



In this connection, how can I not express openly my gratitude and affection for all the pastoral workers in Chile's prisons? You, priest-chaplains, religious sisters and other co-workers, show the Church's maternal concern for our brothers and sisters, making the words of Jesus in the Gospel part of your life: 'I was in prison and you visited me.' (Mt.25:36).

Be bearers of God's merciful love and indefatigable preachers of Christ's saving message. Help everyone to rediscover the road to good; do your part in the sincere conversion of all the men and women with whom you exercise your apostolate, and encourage them to take up a new and better life.

On this occasion I also want to greet all the personnel of the Chilean gendarmerie who work in the penal institutions. Make of your work, also, a service to the brother who is suffering.

Through the intercession of Our Lady of Carmen, loving Mother of all Chileans, I send up my fervent prayer to God that He may help everyone with His grace, that He may help especially our brothers and sisters in prison and make possible the defence of those who are innocent, while with all my heart I give my Apostolic Blessing to the prisoners, their families, to those responsible for prison chaplaincy, to all those who seek to relieve the pains of those who suffer, and to the personnel of the Chilean gendarmerie.

JOHN PAUL II
APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO URUGUAY, CHILE AND ARGENTINA
TO THE INMATES OF ANTOFAGASTA PRISON
6 April 1987

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PASTORAL COMMENT

A few weeks ago I went for the first time in my life into a prison for adults, all men, in Rome. And I went back there on other occasions. The first impression – long, light corridors, clean and soberly decorated – was pleasant; the building was welcoming and warm, very different from what I had imagined. .. The building is huge, with 1,600 people in it, when it was built for 1,070; each day about 30 people come into it.

I had the opportunity to talk in a group, then individually, with these people deprived of liberty, coming from different countries in Latin America and from Spain, aged from 22 to 40, to whom we offer the opportunity to study for a high school certificate, using the programme of the educational movement 'Fe y Alegría' (Faith and Joy).

The group was happy, jovial, almost festive... they took the class seriously and with dedication, but without losing their cheerfulness. .. I looked carefully at each one's face, the colour of his skin; I listened to their different accents, their life-stories, and noticed how their eyes lit up when they were talking about their children: when one of them told me that he had become a father for the first time, of a little girl, a week ago, his eyes filled with tears, and mine did too. While I was talking with each one, the question was in my heart: 'How do they live? How are they treated? How do they feel?... And if one of them were my brother or cousin or relative, someone from my family, what would I think? .. What does time mean for them, when all they want is to 'reduce the sentence'?

All the same, I felt that my attitude was warm, I saw that these human beings were part of this society, of this great family. They were friendly, smiling, accepting hopes of being able to study.... I went home convinced that we ought to stay in contact, that the studies that we were offering are a way of treating them with dignity, with respect, of giving them tools for their formation and growth.

While I was with them the Pope's suggestion for prayer this month was echoing for me – and stays in my mind and heart: 'for prisoners, that they may be treated with justice and with respect for their human dignity' And I asked myself why the Pope is asking this of us. I have reflected and prayed about this situation. We owe respect, justice and dignity to every person, in the same way that we owe it to ourselves, as sons and daughters of God, Father and Mother of all men and women, who for that reason are brothers and sisters to one another.

But when someone has committed a crime, which deserves punishment according to law and justice, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that he or she is condemned for ever, that there is no solution, and we make a 'global' judgement: everything is lost. God, on the contrary, says 'You can start again, I forgive you', and, still more, 'I still love you'. This is dignity restored, this is true respect. Because God looks at the depths of the heart, its sincerity; we very often judge by appearances.

The prison system may be a fit means of recovery and improvement for the person, or it may destroy the person entirely; the person should complete the sentence – with justice and fairness, without abuse – but is not for that reason totally, irremediably lost. This intention from the Pope invites us all, members of this society, to think about these brothers of ours and to take a positive attitude to them, that they may be treated with justice and dignity. Perhaps we think that we can do little or nothing for this cause, but in

addition to prayer, which is always within our reach, if we stop and think we can free our heart of condemnatory judgements, of lack of confidence in the possibility of human recovery; we can reach out to embrace and accept all human beings without discrimination, and still less divisions between 'good' and 'bad'.

Through the Pope the Lord is calling us to be merciful, to be compassionate and welcoming to the other, rather than implacable judges who seek to impose the law, not always in a human way. And, without doubt, we can all apply to ourselves the wise words of the gospel: 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone; and all those who were condemning the adulterous woman went away, beginning with the eldest.' (cf. Jn.8:9)

Without doubt, praying together for this intention will make brotherly and sisterly love grow in us as the human family. Let us not forget that prisoners also have dignity and deserve our respect.

Maria Luisa Berzosa FI

Religious of the Daughters of Jesus, member of the General Council in Rome

See the moving text already published in Prayer and Service, with a testimony of a visit to an African prison:

[The Apostleship of Prayer of the Democratic Republic of Congo visits Makala central prison. \(April - N. 2 - 2010\)](#)

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Have I ever been to visit someone in prison? (I share my experience).
2. If it means people who have committed crimes, who have not respected others, why does the Pope ask us to pray 'That prisoners may be treated with justice and respect for their human dignity?'
3. How can we take part in initiatives to improve the situation of prisoners?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Ex.23:1-9 Justice. Duties towards enemies
- Phil.1:12-14 Paul, prisoner for Christ
- Mt.25:31-46 I was a prisoner and you visited me
- Lk.15:1-7 Parable of mercy

MISSION INTENTION - AUGUST

That young people, called to follow Christ, may be willing to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel to the ends of the earth.



"Young people in particular, I appeal to you: bear witness to your faith through the digital world!....Employ these new technologies to make the Gospel known, so that the Good News of God's infinite love for all people, will resound in new ways across our increasingly technological world!"
- **Pope Benedict XVI, Vatican City, May 20, 2009**

"If you find your sustenance in Christ, my dear young people, and if you live profoundly in him as did the Apostle Paul, you will not be able to resist speaking about him and making him known and loved by many of your friends and contemporaries."

- **Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Youth Day, February 22, 2009**

"If Jesus has become your hope, communicate this to others with your joy and your spiritual, apostolic and social engagement. Let Christ dwell within you, and having placed all your faith and trust in Him, spread this hope around you. Make choices that demonstrate your faith."

- Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Youth Day, February 22, 2009

"The main task for us all is that of a new evangelization aimed at helping younger generations to rediscover the true face of God, who is Love. To you young people, who are in search of a firm hope, I address the very words that Saint Paul wrote to the persecuted Christians in Rome at that time: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13)."

- Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Youth Day, February 22, 2009

"Continue to witness to the Gospel every day and commit yourselves generously in the next missionary initiatives in the Diocese of Rome."

- Pope Benedict XVI Encourages Youth to Evangelize Hometowns, Vatican City, October 7, 2007

"Those who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit understand that placing oneself at the service of the Gospel is not an optional extra, because they are aware of the urgency of transmitting this Good News to others...I assure you that the Spirit of Jesus today is inviting you young people to be bearers of the good news of Jesus to your contemporaries."

- Pope Benedict XVI, Papal Message for World Youth Day '08, July 24, 2007

PASTORAL COMMENT

Every young person has energy, which can be used either for getting involved with doing good or, unfortunately, for doing evil. The world today needs young people who are upright, strong and enthusiastic, to bear witness to Christian values in a world which is turning more and more to self-sufficiency, individualism and materialism. Possessions and power at any price have become the prevailing norm. The moral virtues are beaten down and systematically replaced by counter-values and unnatural relationships, even though the gospel denounces them clearly.

The Church is engaged more and more in the formation of a new generation of young people, whose vision of life is based on holiness and service of others, capable of witnessing in their everyday life, of a new way of seeing, and of using material possessions and temporal power. Most young people dream of acquiring these advantages one day, not to serve their neighbours, but for their own satisfaction and the desire to become 'rich, great and famous.'

As a young African layman, I have always been motivated by an ardent desire to be useful for the world and for the Church, to seek to change the world as it is, which continues to deny Christ and to distance itself from his gospel. Although I feel so small, so powerless, so unworthy, I keep saying to myself in the depths of my being: 'I can live in another way, I can be a witness to Christ as well, I can light a little flame around me, communicate it to others, and so a flood of light will be able to light up the world plunged in the darkness of counter-values and/or the evils which destroy humanity.' To achieve that, I have made myself available to collaborate in the mission of Christ and the Church, in the juvenile branch of the Apostleship of Prayer (the EYM), in my own country and in Africa. Thanks be to God, and when opportunity offers, I travel through some country of the continent to proclaim the good news, to tell young people that Jesus loves them, and needs their collaboration and their witness to change the world.

The essential for young people is not to look on as spectators, with indifference as they watch other people, but to make themselves part of Christ's project and in that way to go about bearing witness everywhere, beginning with their 'Jerusalem', their small circle (family, school, university, group of friends, at work, in the parish...). We are 'citizens' of the world, we have a role to play in changing it, through the witness of our lives and our perseverance in a vision of the holiness to which God calls us: 'be holy, as I am Holy.'

Jean-Claude Ipungu

***in charge of Eucharistic Youth Movement (EYM) in the Democratic Republic of Congo
and Co-ordinator of EYM for Africa and Madagascar***

SEPTEMBER

GENERAL INTENTION - SEPTEMBER

That politicians may always act with honesty, integrity, and love for the truth

The theme of your Assembly: "Witnesses to Christ in the Political Community", takes on a special importance. Of course, the technical formation of politicians is not part of the Church's mission; various other institutions exist for this purpose. Rather, the Church's mission is to "pass moral judgments even in matters relating to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it....

[T]he only means it may use are those which are in accord with the Gospel and the welfare of all men according to the diversity of times and circumstances" (Gaudium et spes, n. 76). The Church concentrates particularly on the formation of the disciples of Christ, in order that they may ever increasingly become witnesses of his Presence, any and everywhere. It is up to the lay faithful to demonstrate concretely in their personal and family life, in social, cultural and political life that the faith enables them to see reality in a new and profound way, and to transform it; that Christian hope broadens the limited horizon of mankind, expanding it towards the true loftiness of his being, towards God; that charity in truth is the most effective force that is capable of changing the world; that the Gospel gives a guarantee of freedom and a message of liberation; that the fundamental principles of the social doctrine of the Church such as the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity and solidarity are extremely relevant and valuable in order to support new paths of development in service to the whole person and to all humanity. It is also the duty of the laity to participate actively in political life, in a manner consistently in accordance with the Church's teaching, bringing their well-founded reasons and high ideals into the democratic debate, and into the search for a broad consensus among all those who care about the defense of life and freedom, the safeguarding of truth and the good of the family, solidarity with the needy and the crucial search for the common good. Christians do not seek political or cultural hegemony but, whatever their work, they are animated by the certainty that Christ is the cornerstone of every human structure (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding The Participation of Catholics in Political Life, 24 November 2002).

In taking up the words of my Predecessors, I too can affirm that politics is a very important field in which to exercise charity. It calls Christians to a strong commitment to citizenship, to building a good life in one's country, and likewise to an effective presence among the international community's institutions and programmes. There is a need for authentically Christian politicians but, even more so, for lay faithful who witness to Christ and the Gospel in the civil and political community. This demand must be reflected in the educational programmes of ecclesial communities and requires new forms of presence and support from Pastors. Christian membership in faith-related associations, ecclesial movements and new communities can provide a good school for these disciples and witnesses, sustained by the charismatic, communitarian, educational and missionary resources of these groups.

This is a demanding challenge. The times in which we live confront us with large and complex problems, and the social question has become an anthropological question at the same time. In the recent past, the ideological paradigms have been shattered that proposed to be a "scientific" response to that question.



The spread of a confused cultural relativism and of a utilitarian and hedonistic individualism weakens democracy and favours the dominance of strong powers. We must recover and reinvigorate authentic political wisdom; be demanding in what concerns our own sphere of competency; make discerning use of the research of the human sciences; face reality in all its aspects, going beyond any kind of ideological reductionism or utopian dream; show we are open to true dialogue and collaboration, bearing in mind that politics is also a complex art of equilibrium between ideals and interests, but never forgetting that the contribution of Christians can be effective only if knowledge of faith becomes knowledge of reality, the key to judgement and transformation. What is needed is a real "revolution of love". The new generations have immense demands and challenges before them in their personal and social life. Your Dicastery looks after them with special care, particularly through the World Youth Days, which have for 25 years been producing rich apostolic fruits among young people. Among these challenges is also the social and political commitment, founded not on partisan ideologies or interests but rather on the choice to serve man and the common good, in the light of the Gospel.

***BENEDICT XVI
ADDRESS TO THE 24TH PLENARY SESSION OF
THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY
21 May 2010***

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Politics orders and organises social life. Those who manage it are politicians. They make decisions which regulate relationships between persons and groups who exhibit legitimate but often conflicting interests. They deal with social disputes by democratic dialogue. For that reason, what they do is crucial for everybody. Politicians – men and women – are the people through whom a society channels public debate, makes decisions about its future, and provides itself with legal and administrative institutions.

This month the Holy Father asks us to pray for these people, more specifically for their honesty, integrity and love of truth.

For their honesty, that they may serve the common good, by carrying out their task without discriminating between communities or persons and without seeking privileges for themselves. All this implies a high concept of justice and a considerable degree of personal detachment. This honesty also brings with it an active and effective concern for the poor and excluded, to procure laws which will protect them and offer them real equality of opportunity. It means a living solidarity which goes beyond narrow national boundaries and is called to reach out to immigrants and poor nations.

For their integrity, that they may be examples of virtue in which society can recognise itself, and human models by which it can be inspired. A democracy is not established on a cold legal structure, but on the democratic disposition and habits of its citizens, who should find in their politicians a motivation to act in a principled way. This is the only way to arouse the springs of generosity and energy that every community should put into action when it wants to make progress.

For their love of truth, a truth which should be sought in the depth of reality and in long-term service, overcoming the temptation of the short-term thinking to which electoral aspirations seem to turn. Truth lies beyond petty interests: a love of truth which involves respect for other ways of thinking, sincere search for the good and for harmony, by means of open dialogue and commitment to the consequences of it.

***Francisco Alvarez de los Mozos, sj
Secretary to the Father General of the Jesuits for Social Justice and Ecology for the whole
Society of Jesus.***

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What is the Church's teaching on the participation of Christians in politics?
2. From the viewpoint of our faith, what is the meaning and foundation of civil authority?
3. What should we do, as Christians, when our politicians are not honest, upright and truthful?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Ezek.34: 1-10 Against the bad shepherds
- 1 Tim. 2:1-7 pray for the authorities
- John 13: 1-17 Service, the meaning of authority

MISSION INTENTION - SEPTEMBER

That Christian communities may have a growing willingness to send missionaries, priests, and lay people, along with concrete resources, to the poorest Churches.



2. The Pilgrim Church

The universal Church, which knows neither borders nor frontiers, is aware of her responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to entire peoples (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53). It is the duty of the Church, called to be a seed of hope, to continue Christ's service in the world. The measure of her mission and service is not material or even spiritual needs limited to the sphere of temporal existence, but instead, it is transcendent salvation, fulfilled in the Kingdom of God (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 27). This Kingdom, although ultimately eschatological and not of this world (cfr Jn

18:36), is also in this world and within its history a force for justice and peace, for true freedom and respect for the dignity of every human person. The Church wishes to transform the world through the proclamation of the Gospel of love, "that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working ... and in this way ... cause the light of God to enter into the world" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 39). With this message I renew my invitation to all the members and institutions of the Church to participate in this mission and this service.

3. *Missio ad gentes*

The mission of the Church, therefore, is to call all peoples to the salvation accomplished by God through his incarnate Son. It is therefore necessary to renew our commitment to proclaiming the Gospel which is a leaven of freedom and progress, brotherhood, unity and peace (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 8). I would "confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14), a duty and a mission which the widespread and profound changes in present-day society render ever more urgent. At stake is the eternal salvation of persons, the goal and the fulfilment of human history and the universe. Animated and inspired by the Apostle of the nations, we

must realize that God has many people in all the cities visited by the apostles of today (cfr Acts 18:10). In fact "the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39).

The whole Church must be committed to the *missio ad gentes*, until the salvific sovereignty of Christ is fully accomplished: "At present, it is true, we are not able to see that all things are in subjection to him" (Heb 2:8).

[...]

I remind Churches of ancient foundation and those that are more recent that the Lord has sent them to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and he has called them to spread Christ, the Light of the nations, to the far corners of the earth. They must make the *Missio ad gentes* a pastoral priority.

I am grateful to the Pontifical Mission Societies and I encourage them in their indispensable service of promoting missionary animation and formation, as well as channelling material help to young Churches. Through these Pontifical Institutions, communion among the Churches is admirably achieved via the exchange of gifts, reciprocal concern and shared missionary endeavours.

5. Conclusion

Missionary zeal has always been a sign of the vitality of our Churches (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 2). Nevertheless it must be reaffirmed that evangelization is primarily the work of the Spirit; before being action, it is witness and irradiation of the light of Christ (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 26) on the part of the local Church, which sends men and women beyond her frontiers as missionaries. I therefore ask all Catholics to pray to the Holy Spirit for an increase in the Church's passion for her mission to spread the Kingdom of God and to support missionaries and Christian communities involved in mission, in the front line, often in situations of hostility and persecution.

At the same time I ask everyone, as a credible sign of communion among the Churches, to offer financial assistance, especially in these times of crisis affecting all humanity, to enable the young local Churches to illuminate the nations with the Gospel of charity.

BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE FOR THE 83rd WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2009
29 June 2009

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PASTORAL COMMENT

The Church is like a group of many communities spread everywhere. And some of them are in great need. Many of them have to live their faith in very difficult situations: in some there is little food for everyone, in others there is fear of war and violence. In some the young people have few opportunities for work, in others fathers are not able to pay for their children's schooling, old people are abandoned and the physically and mentally handicapped lack adequate help. In others many young girls are at risk of early pregnancy or forced into abortion The list is so long that we can hardly come to the end of it.

Remember the time when Jesus asks his disciples 'Give them something to eat yourselves!' and they, thinking that no-one has anything, reply to Jesus 'What are five loaves and two fish for so many?' Well – then the Bible tells us how Jesus took this 'poor contribution', said the blessing, and multiplied it in such a way 'that they filled 12 baskets with the leftovers.'

The Pope invites us, in the missionary intention for this month, to be grateful and to share, not what we have to spare, but what we have, which might be of more use to other brothers and sisters in other communities. When people have everything, they don't remember that there are others in need. The

Pope invites us to renew the faith, so as to live it in community, and to open our hearts and hands to share with those who are poorest and in most need. And we can be sure that there will be enough left over for everybody.

Jorge Eduardo Serrano Ordoñez, sj
Development Office, Jesuit General Curia, Rome

OCTOBER

GENERAL INTENTION - OCTOBER

That the New Evangelization may progress in the oldest Christian countries.

The term, "new evangelization" recalls the need for a renewed manner of proclamation, especially for those who live in a context, like the one today, in which the development of secularization has had a heavy impact, even in traditionally Christian countries. The Gospel is the ever new proclamation of the salvation worked by Christ which makes humanity participate in the mystery of God and in his life of love and opens it to a future of strong, sure hope. Highlighting that



at this moment in history, the Church is called to carry out a new evangelization, means intensifying her missionary action so that it fully corresponds to the Lord's mandate. The Second Vatican Council recalled that "The groups among whom the Church operates are utterly changed so that an entirely new situation arises" (Decree Ad Gentes, n. 6). The farsighted Fathers of the Council saw the cultural changes that were on the horizon and which today are easily verifiable. It is precisely these changes which have created unexpected conditions for believers and require special attention in proclaiming the Gospel, for giving an account of our faith in situations which are different from the past. The current crisis brings with it traces of the exclusion of God from people's lives, from a generalized indifference towards the Christian faith to an attempt to marginalize it from public life. In the past decades, it was still possible to find a general Christian sensibility which unified the common experience of entire generations raised in the shadow of the faith which had shaped culture. Today, unfortunately, we are witnessing a drama of fragmentation which no longer acknowledges a unifying reference point; moreover, it often occurs that people wish to belong to the Church, but they are strongly shaped by a vision of life which is in contrast with the faith.

Proclaiming Jesus Christ the only Saviour of the World, today is more complex than in the past; but our task remains identical to that at the dawn of our history. The mission has not changed, just as the enthusiasm and courage that moved the Apostles and first disciples must not change. The Holy Spirit which prompted them to open the doors and made evangelizers of them (cf. Acts 2: 1-4) is the same Spirit which today moves the Church to a renewed proclamation of hope for the people of our time. St Augustine affirms that we must not think that the grace of evangelization was extended only to the Apostles and with them that fount of grace was exhausted, but "this fount is revealed when it flows, not when it ceases to pour out. And it was in this way that the grace, through the Apostles, reached others too, who were invited to proclaim the Gospel... in deed, it has continued to be a call right up to these days for the entire body of his Only Begotten Son, that is, his Church spread throughout the earth" (cf. Sermon, 239, 1). The grace of the mission continually needs new evangelizers capable of receiving it so that the salvific news of the Word of God never fails to be proclaimed in the changing conditions of history.

There is a dynamic continuity between the proclamation of the first disciples and ours. Throughout the centuries, the Church has never ceased to proclaim the salvific mystery of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, but today that same message needs renewed vigour to convince contemporary man, who is

often distracted and insensitive. For this reason, the new evangelization must try to find ways of making the proclamation of salvation more effective; a proclamation without which personal existence remains contradictory and deprived of what is essential. Even for those who remain tied to their Christian roots, but who live the difficult relationship with modernity, it is important to realize that being Christian is not a type of clothing to wear in private or on special occasions, but is something living and all-encompassing, able to contain all that is good in modern life. I hope that in your work during this Assembly, you will be able to draw up a plan capable of helping the whole Church and the different particular Churches in the commitment to the new evangelization; a project where the urgency of a renewed proclamation involves formation, especially for the new generations, and is combined with a proposal of concrete signs able to make evident the response which the Church intends to offer in this particular moment. If, on the one hand, the entire community is called to reinvigorate its missionary spirit to proclaim the Good News that the people of our time are waiting for, we cannot forget that the lifestyle of believers needs to be genuinely credible and all the more convincing for the dramatic conditions in which those who need to hear it live. For this reason, we want to make the words of the Servant of God, Pope Paul VI our own, when he said with regard to evangelization, "It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus — the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 41).

***BENEDICT XVI
ADDRESS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING THE NEW EVANGELIZATION
30 May 2011***

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Other texts:

- BENEDICT XVI - APOSTOLIC LETTER IN THE FORM OF MOTU PROPRIO - *UBIUMQUE ET SEMPER* - ESTABLISHING THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING THE NEW EVANGELIZATION - 21 September 2010
- SYNOD OF BISHOPS - XIII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY - THE NEW EVANGELIZATION FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH - *LINEAMENTA* - 2 February 2011

PASTORAL COMMENT

Note: On June 28, 2010, Pope Benedict announced his desire to create a Dicastery for the promotion of the New Evangelization. During this present month the Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place, led by Archbishop Salvatore Fisichella, addressing the theme: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.

Have you ever heard some good news that made you so happy and excited that you couldn't wait to share it with others? It was such good news that you wanted others to know it so that they could share your happiness. You went looking for people with whom you could share the news or you went to your telephone, computer, or i-phone so that you could communicate that good news to everyone you knew as soon as possible.

That's the spirit behind this month's General Intention. It's the spirit behind the "new evangelization." "Evangelization," or the proclamation of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, has been part of the Church's mission from the beginning. It was the focus of the 1974 Synod of Bishops and Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation that followed it. Since then, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have called for a "new evangelization." What's "new" about it?

Evangelization is concerned with bringing the Gospel to parts of the world where it has never been heard. The new evangelization has to do with bringing the Gospel to countries where Christianity was planted centuries ago, where it took root and flourished but is now dying for a variety of reasons. The newness of this evangelization also refers to the need for new methods of presenting the Gospel in bold and convincing ways, especially employing the new communication technologies.

This is such a deep concern of Pope Benedict that in October, 2010 he created the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. He also made it the focus for the Thirteenth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which is meeting in the Vatican this month.

On 30 May 2011, Pope Benedict met with the first plenary session of the new Pontifical Council and he told them: "To proclaim Jesus Christ the only Savior of the world seems more complex today than in the past; but our task continues to be the same as at the dawn of our history. The mission has not changed, just as the enthusiasm and courage that moved the Apostles and the first disciples must not change." He went on to say that "the new evangelization must find the ways to make the proclamation of salvation more effective."

Ultimately the work of the new evangelization, while it involves using new methods to tell people the Good News of Jesus Christ, depends upon personal witness. It depends upon Christians whose lifestyle attracts others to Christ. As Pope Benedict said to the Pontifical Council, "the lifestyle of believers needs real credibility, as much more convincing as the more dramatic is the condition of the persons to whom it is addressed." Such witness includes the commitment to working for social justice. On 16 May 2011 Pope Benedict told a meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: "my wish for you is that the Risen Lord may warm your hearts and help you to spread the fruit of redemption through a new evangelization of the social sphere and the witness of a righteous life according to the Gospel."

Lastly, though globalization is a force that diminishes the differences of cultures, the circumstances of various countries remain different and will require different approaches to evangelization. In his Apostolic Letter announcing the creation of the new Pontifical Council, Pope Benedict wrote: "to speak of a 'new evangelization' does not in fact mean that a single formula should be developed that would hold the same for all circumstances. And yet it is not difficult to see that what all the Churches living in traditionally Christian territories need is a renewed missionary impulse, an expression of a new, generous openness to the gift of grace."

Ultimately the new evangelization depends upon God's grace. It depends upon the Holy Spirit filling believers with the knowledge of God's love—good news that they won't be able to keep to themselves.

Fr. James Kubicki, S.J.

U.S. National Secretary – Apostleship of Prayer

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. What does our duty of evangelisation refer to? Have I taken part at any time in an evangelising mission?
2. How can our community offer welcome and an appropriate response to those who come to us because they are searching spiritually?

3. What are the chief difficulties and obstacles to an enthusiastic and renewed proclamation of the faith? Have we learned from our mistakes?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- 1 Cor.9:12 We put up with everything so as not to create obstacles to the gospel of Christ
- 1 Cor.9:16 Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel
- Lk.9: 1-6 Sent to proclaim the Good News

MISSION INTENTION - OCTOBER

That the celebration of World Mission Day may result in a renewed commitment to evangelization.



The co-responsibility of all

The universal mission involves all, all things and always. The Gospel is not an exclusive possession of whoever has received it but a gift to share, good news to communicate. And this gift-commitment is not only entrusted to a few but on the contrary to all the baptized, who are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9), so that they may declare his wonderful deeds.

All activities are involved in it. Attention to and cooperation in the Church’s evangelizing work in the world cannot be limited to a few moments or special

occasions nor can they be considered as one of the many pastoral activities: the Church’s missionary dimension is essential and must therefore always be borne in mind.

It is important that both individual baptized people and ecclesial communities be involved in the mission, not sporadically or occasionally but in a constant manner, as a form of Christian life. The World Mission Day itself is not an isolated moment in the course of the year but rather a valuable opportunity to pause and reflect on whether and how we respond to our missionary vocation; an essential response for the Church’s life.

Global evangelization

Evangelization is a complex process and entails various elements. Among them missionary animation has always paid special attention to solidarity. This is also one of the objectives of World Mission Day which, through the Pontifical Mission Societies, requests aid in order to carry out the tasks of evangelization in mission territories. It is a matter of supporting institutions necessary for establishing and consolidating the Church through catechists, seminaries and priests, and of making one’s own contribution to improving the standard of living for people in countries where the phenomena of poverty, malnutrition — especially among children — disease, the lack of health care and education are the most serious.

This is also part of the Church’s mission and in proclaiming the Gospel, she takes human life to heart fully. The Servant of God Paul VI reaffirmed that in evangelization it is unacceptable to disregard areas

that concern human advancement, justice and liberation from every kind of oppression, obviously with respect for the autonomy of the political sphere.

Lack of concern for the temporal problems of humanity “would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbour who is suffering and in need” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nn. 31, 34). It would not be in harmony with the behaviour of Jesus who “went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity” (Mt 9:35).

Thus, through co-responsible participation in the Church’s mission, the Christian becomes a builder of the communion, peace and solidarity that Christ has given us, who cooperates in the implementation of God’s saving plan for all humanity. The challenges that this plan encounters calls all Christians to walk together and the mission is an integral part of this journey with everyone. In it – although in earthenware vessels – we bear our Christian vocation, the priceless treasure of the Gospel, the living witness of Jesus dead and Risen, encountered and believed in in the Church.

May World Mission Day revive in each one the desire to go and the joy of “going” to meet humanity, bringing Christ to all. In his name I impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and, in particular, to those who make the greatest efforts and suffer most for the Gospel.

BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE FOR THE WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2011
6 January 2011

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PASTORAL COMMENT

We are reminded this month that proclaiming the Gospel is the main task and very identity of the Church. As individual Christians we are asked to renew our commitment to evangelization.

But, as a lay person in the United States, I have noticed that in some circles evangelization is something Catholics don’t want to talk about—much less do. Many Catholics seem embarrassed that they, as Christians, have a duty to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples. They seem to prefer a Church that minds its own business and doesn’t impose on others. Who are we, after all, to tell others that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that he died and rose again to free every person from sin and death? Those are pretty lofty claims. Who wants to start an argument? Worse, who wants to look like a fool?

If that’s how I feel about evangelization, perhaps it’s time to re-examine my own faith as a Catholic. Maybe I was baptized into Christ as an infant, but have I ever really owned that baptism? Maybe I believe in Jesus, but have I met him? Do I know him in the Word, do I know him in the Eucharist, do I know him in prayer, do I know him in my daily life? Do I feel that without Jesus I would be miserable? Do I feel that with Jesus I have everything? Jesus promised to be with us always: is Jesus walking with me these days?

In an address to the Pontifical Mission Societies last year, Pope Benedict said that “a fundamental condition for proclamation is to let oneself be completely grasped by Christ, the Word of God incarnate, because only those who listen attentively to the incarnate Word, who are intimately united to him, can become his heralds.” Otherwise, says the Holy Father, our efforts to evangelize become merely a “human, social project, hiding or glossing over the transcendent dimension of the salvation offer by God in Christ.”

Evangelization has become an increasingly complex activity in the modern world. But its complexity need not deter us. If we have actually been grasped by Christ, we will be proclaiming the Gospel authentically in everything we do. To begin, we will be motivated by Christ’s love for all people, whether sinners or

saints, believers or enemies of the Church. We will pray that all may find the peace of Christ, especially those people we encounter in our day. Rather than seek wealth and power, we will place ourselves, as Jesus did, in solidarity with the victims of the world, those who hunger and thirst, those who endure poverty, violence, and injustice. We will get involved and do what we can to relieve their suffering. Because we want to do more, we will give our own money to support people who are doing Christ's work in our neighborhoods and in the world. And finally we will not be afraid to let others know who we are, what we believe, and why we live as we do.

In his first letter, St. Peter seems to speak directly to those of us who are timid. "Now who is going to harm you if you are enthusiastic for what is good? But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you. Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear" (I Peter 3: 13-16a).

Douglas Leonard, Ph.D.
Director of Operations and Development
Apostleship of Prayer – USA

NOVEMBER

GENERAL INTENTION – NOVEMBER

That bishops, priests, and all ministers of the Gospel may bear the courageous witness of fidelity to the crucified and risen Lord.

Dear Seminarians,

When in December 1944 I was drafted for military service, the company commander asked each of us what we planned to do in the future. I answered that I wanted to become a Catholic priest. The lieutenant replied: "Then you ought to look for something else. In the new Germany priests are no longer needed". I knew that this "new Germany" was already coming to an end, and that, after the enormous devastation which that madness had brought upon the country, priests would be needed more than ever. Today the situation is completely changed. In different ways, though, many people nowadays also think that the Catholic priesthood is not a "job" for the future, but one that belongs more to the past. You, dear friends, have decided to enter the seminary and to prepare for priestly ministry in the Catholic Church in spite of such opinions and objections. You have done a good thing. Because people will always have need of God, even in an age marked by technical mastery of the world and globalization: they will always need the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the God who gathers us together in the universal Church in order to learn with him and through him life's true meaning and in order to uphold and apply the standards of true humanity. Where people no longer perceive God, life grows empty; nothing is ever enough. People then seek escape in euphoria and violence; these are the very things that increasingly threaten young people. God is alive. He has created every one of us and he knows us all. He is so great that he has time for the little things in our lives: "Every hair of your head is numbered". God is alive, and he needs people to serve him and bring him to others. It does make sense to become a priest: the world needs priests, pastors, today, tomorrow and always, until the end of time.



[6] ... Recently we have seen with great dismay that some priests disfigured their ministry by sexually abusing children and young people. Instead of guiding people to greater human maturity and setting them an example, their abusive behaviour caused great damage for which we feel profound shame and regret. As a result of all this, many people, perhaps even some of you, might ask whether it is good to become a priest; whether the choice of celibacy makes any sense as a truly human way of life. Yet even the most reprehensible abuse cannot discredit the priestly mission, which remains great and pure. Thank God, all of us know exemplary priests, men shaped by their faith, who bear witness that one can attain to an authentic, pure and mature humanity in this state and specifically in the life of celibacy. Admittedly, what has happened should make us all the more watchful and attentive, precisely in order to examine ourselves earnestly, before God, as we make our way towards priesthood, so as to understand whether this is his will for me. It is the responsibility of your confessor and your superiors to accompany you and help you along this path of discernment. It is an essential part of your journey to practice the fundamental human virtues, with your gaze fixed on the God who has revealed himself in Christ, and to let yourselves be purified by him ever anew.

**BENEDICT XVI
LETTER TO SEMINARIANS
18 October 2010**

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PASTORAL COMMENT

Every bishop, every priest, every deacon, when he receives the sacrament of holy orders through the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration, is established in a ministry instituted to give a precise service to Christ and his Church, in which he is present, crucified and risen. In the Church, which is all of us, the community of the baptised, we receive the sacraments which are precisely this, real signs of Christ who lives in the midst of us, and accompanies us by the action of his Spirit. The sacrament of priestly ordination is another living sign of Christ's presence because, for example, without the priest sacraments like the Eucharist, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, cannot be celebrated, nor, besides that, can priestly ordination itself be celebrated without the bishop. But there is something else that we ought to remember: through the sacrament of ordination the bishop, or the priest, or the deacon becomes 'another Christ' at the service of his brothers and sisters, which means that he is transformed in order to act, not as a simple representative of Christ, and in his name, but that he has the serious responsibility of acting 'in the person of Christ' himself, and of doing what St. Paul says: 'Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death – even death on a cross.' (Phil. 2: 5-8)

In the last few years we have seen how the Church has also experienced, with sorrow, the problem of paedophilia, even within herself. Some of her priests abused minors, boys and girls, pre-adolescent young people, or handicapped people. On the one hand this problem is a monstrous crime and a penal offence which involves damaging or changing the normal development of a child or adolescent, with long-term psychological and social consequences for the person. And on the other hand the problem of paedophile priests is a terrible scandal for the Church because it brings injury to her in something as intimately part of her as the service of her priests; furthermore, it endangers the trust which the faithful should feel in their priests and in the Church herself. Obviously, a minister who commits an act of this kind cannot be 'another Christ' at the service of his brothers and sisters, and in whom they can trust. The scandal of pederasty darkens and soils the image of the ministerial priest. Fortunately, in comparison with the total number of priests in the world, the priests who have committed these abuses against people who trusted them, for various unjustifiable motives, are few in number. The majority are faithful to their vocation and work courageously and with enthusiasm in different places: parishes, schools, hospitals, prisons, distant missions, and so on. In 2010 there were over 410,000 Catholic priests in the world. Against that, the number of priest whom the Catholic Church investigated between 2001 and 2010 and found guilty of sexual abuse against minors amounted to about 300 priests, whose offences were committed over a period of about 50 years; that is 0.3% of the total number of priests in the world. At all events, one single case is enough to offend us all as Church, in addition to the specific offence to the dignity of the person who is victim of an abusing priest.

As Church, we have every reason to pray that not one single incident like those may be repeated, and we pray as the Holy Father asks us to do this month that those who have been ordained as bishops, priests and deacons may be true and authentic servants, always giving courageous witness to their priesthood, in fidelity to Christ. Let us dedicate ourselves to this intention, at home, in the family, in the parish community, that the Church may always receive from the Lord priests formed according to Christ's heart.

Perhaps it would help us to pray as grandmothers and grandfathers used to do: 'Lord, give us priests who may be holy, wise and simple.'

Fr. Luis Javier Sarralde, S.J.

Colombian Jesuit, specialist in Canon Law

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

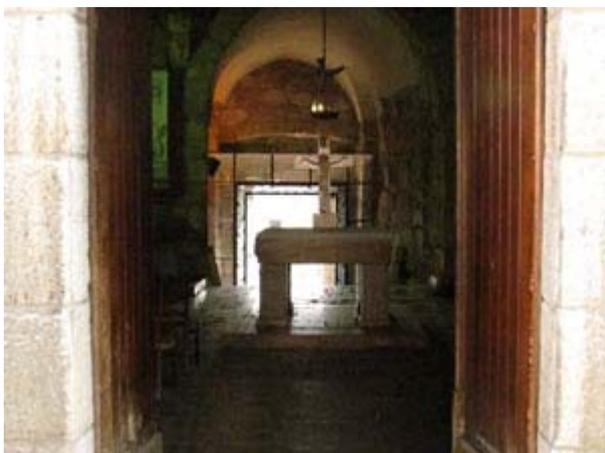
1. I share my personal testimony of a priest that I have known whom I admire as a 'courageous witness of fidelity to the crucified and risen Lord'
2. What have we learned as Church after knowing about grave situations of abuse in which some priests have been involved?
3. Are we understanding towards our parish priest and towards priests in general, knowing that they are weak human beings like the rest of us?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- 1 Tim.3: 1-13 how those who preside should behave
- Matt.10: 16-18 I send them as sheep among wolves
- Lk. 24: 36-49 witnesses of the Risen Lord

MISSION INTENTION - NOVEMBER

That the pilgrim Church on earth may shine as a light to the nations.



"The nations will walk in its light" (Rev 21:24)

"The nations will walk in its light" (Rev 21:24). The goal of the Church's mission is to illumine all peoples with the light of the Gospel as they journey through history towards God, so that in Him they may reach their full potential and fulfilment. We should have a longing and a passion to illumine all peoples with the light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church, so that all may be gathered into the one human family, under God's loving fatherhood.

It is in this perspective that the disciples of Christ spread throughout the world work, struggle and groan under the burden of suffering, offering their very lives. I strongly reiterate what was so frequently affirmed by my venerable Predecessors: the Church works not to extend her power or assert her dominion, but to lead all people to Christ, the salvation of the world. We seek only to place ourselves at the service of all humanity, especially the suffering and the

excluded, because we believe that "the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today... is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1), which "has experienced marvellous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself" (Redemptoris Missio, 2).

1. All Peoples are called to salvation

In truth, the whole of humanity has the radical vocation to return to its source, to return to God, since in Him alone can it find fulfilment through the restoration of all things in Christ. Dispersion, multiplicity, conflict and enmity will be healed and reconciled through the blood of the Cross and led back to unity.

This new beginning can already be seen in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, who draws all things to himself, renewing them and enabling them to share in the eternal joy of God. The future of the new creation is already shining in our world and, despite contradictions and suffering, it enkindles hope for new life. The Church's mission is to spread hope "contagiously" among all peoples. This is why Christ calls, justifies, sanctifies and sends his disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God, so that all nations may become the People of God. It is only in this mission that the true journey of humanity is understood and attested. The universal mission should become a fundamental constant in the life of the Church. Proclamation of the Gospel must be for us, as it was for the Apostle Paul, a primary and unavoidable duty.

2. The Pilgrim Church

The universal Church, which knows neither borders nor frontiers, is aware of her responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to entire peoples (cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi, 53). It is the duty of the Church, called to be a seed of hope, to continue Christ's service in the world. The measure of her mission and service is not material or even spiritual needs limited to the sphere of temporal existence, but instead, it is transcendent salvation, fulfilled in the Kingdom of God (cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi, 27). This Kingdom, although ultimately eschatological and not of this world (cfr Jn 18:36), is also in this world and within its history a force for justice and peace, for true freedom and respect for the dignity of every human person. The Church wishes to transform the world through the proclamation of the Gospel of love, "that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working ... and in this way ... cause the light of God to enter into the world" (Deus Caritas Est, 39). With this message I renew my invitation to all the members and institutions of the Church to participate in this mission and this service.

3. Missio ad gentes

The mission of the Church, therefore, is to call all peoples to the salvation accomplished by God through his incarnate Son. It is therefore necessary to renew our commitment to proclaiming the Gospel which is a leaven of freedom and progress, brotherhood, unity and peace (cf. Ad Gentes, 8). I would "confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 14), a duty and a mission which the widespread and profound changes in present-day society render ever more urgent. At stake is the eternal salvation of persons, the goal and the fulfilment of human history and the universe. Animated and inspired by the Apostle of the nations, we must realize that God has many people in all the cities visited by the apostles of today (cfr Acts 18:10). In fact "the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39).

The whole Church must be committed to the missio ad gentes, until the salvific sovereignty of Christ is fully accomplished: "At present, it is true, we are not able to see that all things are in subjection to him" (Heb 2:8).

4. Called to evangelize even through martyrdom

[...]

Participation in the mission of Christ is also granted to those who preach the Gospel, for whom is reserved the same destiny as their Master. "Remember the words I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too" (Jn 15:20). The Church walks the same path and suffers the same destiny as Christ, since she acts not on the basis of any human logic or relying on her own strength, but instead she follows the way of the Cross, becoming, in filial obedience to the Father, a witness and a travelling companion for all humanity.

I remind Churches of ancient foundation and those that are more recent that the Lord has sent them to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and he has called them to spread Christ, the Light of the nations, to the far corners of the earth. They must make the *Missio ad gentes* a pastoral priority.

[...]

BENEDICT XVI
MESSAGE FOR THE 83rd WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2009
29 June 2009

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PASTORAL COMMENT

With this missionary intention the Holy Father invites all Christians to meditate on the vocation and mission of the Church, but also to think about their own part in the realization of it. For we are not invited solely to pray for the Church – as if she were standing in front of us – but, rather, we are impelled to contribute with our whole lives to making the Church live its vocation, which is to bear witness to the God who was made man for all people, and to proclaim in this way the light which came into the world in Jesus Christ. As Church we are invited to unite ourselves with Zachariah's canticle and to confess before all people that Christ has come to visit us from on high as 'light to those in darkness, those who dwell in the shadow of death, and guide us into the way of peace.' (cf. Luke 2:79).

God wants to continue this work which he has begun in Jesus Christ today by means of the Church, that she may bring her light to all nations and proclaim salvation to them. But as regards the fulfilment of this task the Church finds herself not only still on the way, but also dependent on the commitment and collaboration of all Christians. So, just as Christ on his way to the cross asked his disciples at Gethsemane to pray with him, the 'pilgrim Church', feeling her own weakness and recognising her need, asks her faithful to pray for her, that she may be able to live up to her mission of giving testimony to God's immense love for people, and put herself as far as possible at the service of all who still lack the light, and still long for their redemption.

Uniting ourselves with this prayer of the Church, let us be close and compassionate to all who have not yet experienced the love of Jesus Christ, and let us make our own the Church's concern for the people 'who are in darkness'. But our prayer will become deep and true to the extent that we are ready to offer our life to God for the Church and for all who are still suffering from lack of light. In this way prayer will in the end be transformed into prayer for ourselves also, and for our own conversion, which we always need. That is, it will be transformed into the humble petition to God that he may graciously help us to live better our baptismal vocation, through which we belong to the Church which needs our prayer, and through which, together with the Church, we are called to proclaim the light of Jesus Christ to all people.

Fr. Toni Witwer, S.J.
Postulator General of the Society of Jesus

DECEMBER

GENERAL INTENTION - DECEMBER



That migrants throughout the world may be welcomed with generosity and authentic love, especially by Christian communities.

62. Another aspect of integral human development that is worthy of attention is the phenomenon of migration. This is a striking phenomenon because of the sheer numbers of people involved, the social, economic, political, cultural and religious problems it raises, and the dramatic challenges it poses to nations and the international community. We can say that we are facing a social phenomenon of epoch-

making proportions that requires bold, forward-looking policies of international cooperation if it is to be handled effectively. Such policies should set out from close collaboration between the migrants' countries of origin and their countries of destination; it should be accompanied by adequate international norms able to coordinate different legislative systems with a view to safeguarding the needs and rights of individual migrants and their families, and at the same time, those of the host countries. No country can be expected to address today's problems of migration by itself. We are all witnesses of the burden of suffering, the dislocation and the aspirations that accompany the flow of migrants. The phenomenon, as everyone knows, is difficult to manage; but there is no doubt that foreign workers, despite any difficulties concerning integration, make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country through their labour, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the money they send home. Obviously, these labourers cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance [142].

BENEDICT XVI
ENCYCLICAL LETTER
CARITAS IN VERITATE
29 June 2009

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PASTORAL COMMENT

For our Pastoral comment for this prayer intention, we share with you the central paragraphs of a message our AP Director General, Father Adolfo Nicolás, addressed to the JRS:

Fr General's message to Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) on its 30th anniversary

As you are aware, the world of displaced persons that JRS desires to serve is rapidly changing. Since the Vietnamese boat people first inspired Fr Arrupe's response of compassion on behalf of the Society, many new forms of displacement, many new experiences of vulnerability and suffering have emerged. You know these better than I: the victims of natural and environmental disasters; those who lose their lands

and homes because of the world's hunger for minerals and resources; the increasing number of urban refugees, just to name a few. How can JRS promote both the spirit and the structures of Ignatian freedom to respond with agility to these new calls upon our compassion?

In our service to refugees, I ask how JRS can better build participatory communities. The long tradition of depending on the help of others might hinder those we serve from taking responsibility for their own needs. To help people do the right thing, without depending on someone from outside, who can do it better and faster, will need much detachment and patience; but, in the long run, it will be more effective. We want to respond to needs, certainly. But how can we build something more lasting, something which strengthens the humanity of those for whom we work? How can we help them experience and move towards reconciliation, the healing of deep wounds often connected with violent displacement, so that communities of peace can emerge?

I also wonder how JRS can advocate and promote more actively the Gospel value of hospitality in today's world of closed borders and increased hostility to strangers. Hospitality is that deeply human and Christian value that recognizes the claim that someone has, not because he or she is a member of my family or my community or my race or my faith, but simply because he or she is a human being who deserves welcome and respect. It is the virtue of the good Samaritan, who saw in the man by the roadside, not a member of another race, but a brother in need. It is a value that you in JRS know is being eroded in today's world, in culture and in policies, because so many are fearful of "the other". Many are closing their borders and their hearts, in fear or resentment, to those who are different. JRS, in serving refugees, is Gospel hospitality in action; but, perhaps, we can ask how we may, creatively, effectively and positively, influence the closed and unwelcoming values of the cultures in which we work.

Adolfo Nicolás SI

Superior General

See complete message at:

- <http://www.jrs.net/Director?TN=LETTER-20101221072912&L=1>

See also:

- MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI FOR THE 97th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (2011)

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

1. Do we notice racist or xenophobic attitudes in our society? In ourselves? What can we do as Christians to counteract this?
2. How can we promote more actively the values of welcome and hospitality in a world more and more hostile, which is progressively closing its frontiers to foreigners?
3. What specific initiative can we take in our Christian community for the benefit of migrants, always respecting the dignity of those who receive help?

BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

- Lev.19: 33 – 34 welcome the stranger
- 1 Cor. 12:13 we are one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free
- Mt.25: 31-46 I was a stranger and you welcomed me

MISSION INTENTION - DECEMBER

That Christ may reveal himself to all humanity with the light that shines forth from Bethlehem and is reflected in the face of his Church.



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We celebrate with joy the Solemnity of the Epiphany, the "manifestation" of Christ to the peoples who are represented by the Magi, mysterious figures who came from the East. We celebrate Christ, the destination of the pilgrimage of peoples in search of salvation.

In the First Reading we listened to the Prophet, inspired by God, to contemplate Jerusalem as a beacon of light which guides all the peoples on their journey through the darkness and fog of the earth.

The glory of the Lord shines on the holy City and attracts first of all his own children, displaced and dispersed, but also, at the same time, the pagan nations who come to Zion from all sides as to a common homeland, enriching it with their goods (cf. Is 60: 1-6).

[...]

Several spontaneous questions arise: in what sense is Christ still the *lumen gentium*, the Light of the peoples, today? What point - if one can so describe it - has the universal journey of the peoples toward God reached? Is it in a phase of progress or of regression? And further: who are the Magi today? How, thinking of today's world, should we interpret these mysterious figures of the Gospel?

To answer these questions, I would like to return to what the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council said in this regard. And I am pleased to add that immediately after the Council, the Servant of God, Paul VI, exactly 40 years ago on precisely 26 March 1967, dedicated to the development of the peoples his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.

The whole of the Second Vatican Council was truly stirred by the longing to proclaim Christ, the Light of the world, to contemporary humanity. In the heart of the Church, from the summit of her hierarchy, emerged the impelling desire, awakened by the Spirit, for a new epiphany of Christ in the world, a world that the modern epoch had profoundly transformed and that, for the first time in history, found itself facing the challenge of a global civilization in which the centre could no longer be Europe or even what we call the West and the North of the world.

The need to work out a new world political and economic order was emerging but, at the same time and above all, one that would be both spiritual and cultural, that is, a renewed humanism.

This observation became more and more obvious: a new world economic and political order cannot work unless there is a spiritual renewal, unless we can once again draw close to God and find God in our midst.

[...]

Christ is light, and light cannot darken but can only illuminate, brighten, reveal. No one, therefore, should be afraid of Christ and his message! And if, down through history, Christians as limited people and sinners have sometimes betrayed him by their behaviour, this makes it even clearer that the light is Christ and that the Church reflects it only by remaining united to him.

[...]

Dear brothers and sisters, let us too pause in spirit to contemplate the image of the adoration of the Magi. It contains a demanding and ever timely message. It is demanding and ever timely, first of all for the Church, which, reflected in Mary, is called to show to mankind Jesus, nothing but Jesus.

Indeed, he is the All and the Church exists solely to remain united to him and to make him known to the world. May the Mother of the Incarnate Word help us to be docile disciples of her Son, the Light of the nations!

The example of the Magi of that time is also an invitation to the Magi of today to open their minds and hearts to Christ and to offer him the gifts of their research. I would like to repeat to them, and to all the people of our time: do not be afraid of Christ's light! His light is the splendour of the truth. Let yourselves be enlightened by him, all peoples of the earth; let yourselves be enveloped by his love and you will find the way of peace. So may it be.

BENEDICT XVI
HOMILY - SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY
6 January 2007

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PASTORAL COMMENT

We can receive no greater gift from another than to be chosen as a dearly loved friend. So we can adequately begin to celebrate Christmas only when we ponder and take to heart the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life' (John 3.16). Then we begin to appreciate the prophecy of Isaiah taken up by Matthew (4.16), 'The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light' (Is. 9.1). Our purple of Advent is the half-light which foretells the dawn of full day, all the wonder and the glory of God's never failing love for each of us, his creatures, revealed, shown to be the deepest truth of our lives, in the birth of Jesus, sent by the Father so that in his light we might see light and, believing, might follow his way to true peace and not be lost.

When we reflect on the various intentions that the Holy Father asks us to pray for month by month, we discover that in nearly all of them what we are pleading for is that our hearts and minds, or the hearts and minds of others, may be more open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, open to greater loving, greater self-giving. As individuals and as groups – families, nations, Church – to be truly alive we have to be open to this growth. Our minds must grow in knowing and appreciating the fundamental truth of humanity, our absolute dependence on God and his absolute self-giving in loving us. And our hearts must grow in reflecting that love by our self-giving for God and for one another. From the manger of Bethlehem to his Sermon on the Mount to the Cross of Calvary, this was what Jesus taught, by word and example, with the power of the Spirit of Wisdom and Love, the light sent to guide mankind from self-destruction to newness of life.

The same Jesus, who said that he had come that we might have life to the full, offered us too the surest way to that life, his own way lit by divine self-giving, shining already in the Bethlehem stable and empowered by the Holy Spirit. 'He who walks in the dark' he tells us, 'does not know where he is going. While you still have the light, believe in the light and you will become sons of the light I, the light, have come into the world so that whoever believes in me need not stay in the dark any more' (John 12. 35&46). The dark, evil, the choosing of self rather than God, was to be overcome first in himself, 'He who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself for I always do what pleases him' (John 8.29), and then in those who open themselves to the light that he brings, 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away; because I have come from heaven, not to do

my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me' (John 6.37-39). So, won for us by the love of Christ's total self-giving, the Holy Spirit of Adoption unites us with him as dearly loved sons and daughters of the Father.

It is to shine the light of this Sonship deep within our minds and hearts that Christ comes to us today and every day, and so empowers us, by the gift of his Holy Spirit, in our turn to reflect the light of God's love to others. He comes to be our Way to the Father, the Truth of our loving relationship with him, and our sharing in the very Life of God . When he offers us the real food and drink of his Body and Blood, the living water of the Spirit, the true vine of his Body, the Church, and eternal life, he reminds us that the world we think of as reality is no more than a training ground for growth in self-giving love, and our lives here are important only as our preparing for, and beginning already to live, in the thanksgiving of our prayer and in all our relationships, the fullness of life in our Father's love. He invites us, his brothers and sisters, to see our lives and the needs of others in this Bethlehem light of his loving, light which reveals our true reality, so that we may bring his peace to our world by our being faithful witnesses to his truth, his self-giving, in the joy of his Easter glory.

James Fitzimons, S.J.

Former AP National Secretary in South Africa