

SEEKING TO KNOW THE HEART OF CHRIST

1. THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE

It might seem presumptuous on our part to enquire into the movements and motivations of the human heart of Jesus during his days on earth if Jesus himself had not offered them to us for our comfort and imitation. He himself invites us to an ever deeper knowledge of his inner self in telling us, *'learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart'*. And Pope John Paul II, in his 1997 message to the youth of the world, writes, 'In communion with the whole people of God on the journey towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I want to invite you this year to fix your eyes on Jesus, Teacher and Lord of Life, with the help of the words recalled in John's Gospel, **'Teacher, where are you staying?' -- 'Come and see'**. (cf.1.38-39)'

So we ask the Lord to reveal to us more and more of his human ways of thinking and feeling, of relating and self-giving, of hoping and trusting, of forbearing and forgiving, of the well-springs of all his human loving, since it is in these that we can begin to perceive the unfathomable love of God for us. True, the Jesus of now, the Jesus of our prayer and of our Eucharist, is the Risen Christ who has died into the embrace of the Father. But we know him, as he intends us to know him, from watching him and listening to him and accompanying him on the long road from his Baptism to Calvary and beyond. *'Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be forever'* (Hebrews 13.8).

It would seem to be over-ambitious, and beyond our scope, to try to explore and analyse all that the Gospels reveal of the inner life, the prayer and deepest motivation, of Jesus during his life on earth. Better, surely, to stay with the words of Jesus himself, *'Come and see'*; to watch and listen reflectively to Jesus in the gospels, content with whatever he tells us through his words and actions about the ways of his heart -- in his prayer, his endless compassion, his readiness to forgive and to suffer in any way that would benefit his 'little ones', and his fearless indignation at anything that harmed them.

To save what was lost

In a sense which is uniquely true of Jesus, the *fact* of his human existence is inextricably linked with its *purpose*, his mission in assuming our human nature. In every creed, and in every theological statement about the Incarnation, the historical and stupendous event, 'the Word was made flesh', goes hand in hand with the explanation -- to be the Saviour of mankind. We are on sure ground, then, in our asking for light on the motivation of his human living, when we listen to Jesus as he tells us why he has come.

God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. John 3.17

The Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost. Luke 19.10

I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners. Mark 2.17

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10.45

I lay down my life for my sheep. John 10.15.

Already in these texts we experience the compassion reaching out from Jesus to the misery of people who had lost their way. He had moved among them and seen how the rigid legalism of their spiritual leaders had left them 'bewildered and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd', many of them longing for God but rejected by the élite and counted as sinners, ritually unclean, for failures which were in practice beyond their control. All that he wants is to devote his life to serving their need to be saved from their desperation, assuring them of the unconditional love of God and of his forgiveness, and to rescue them from the self-pity of their loveless existence even at the cost of his life. His mission, in fact, is to free all people from the burden and guilt of their hopeless self-seeking by drawing them, through faith in himself, to share in his trusting obedience to a loving Father and in generous self-giving to one another.

A Greater Redemption.

Thus far we recognise the traditional shape of Redemption: sins forgiven and 'souls saved'. But the purpose of the Saviour goes far beyond this -- he has come bringing a new life for all who will welcome him and offering the way to that life through the truth of God's love and our generous response to it. '***I am the Way,***' he declares, '***the Truth and the Life***'. He is the man who has found a treasure, bursting with the good news of the love of the Father so little recognised by his children, ready to 'sell everything he has' to share with others the riches of his heart and draw them together, bonded in a new covenant in the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. So he tells us:

I have come that they may have life. John 10.10

I have come to bring fire on earth, and how I wish it were blazing already. Luke 12.49

I, the light, have come into this world so that whoever believes in me need not stay in the dark any more. John 12.46.

I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth. John 18.37

If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples; you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free. John 8.31-32

To be rescued by this Saviour is to be alive with trust and loving, filled with the joy of walking again in the companionship of God, open and self-giving in sharing our happiness with others. This is the experience of Jesus himself and of his Mother, and even though the sharing will be costly -- a 'baptism' of pain and humiliation and death -- his heart longs for this hour of his empowerment -- '***Father, save me from this hour?***' he said a few days before his crucifixion, '***But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour***'. (John 12.27). And it was not for any self-regarding triumph that he wanted this. On the eve of his death on the Cross he prayed to his Father, '***Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you; and through the power over all mankind that you have given him, let him give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him***'. (John 17.1-2). There was never such generosity of heart as this, a love poured out even on those who tortured his life away -- '***Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing***' (Luke 23.34) -- and even, in his dying moments, on the thief beside him who turned to him -- '***I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise***'.

Driven by Love

We can marvel at the compassion of this Master and Lord whose heart goes out to heal all wounds and bring comfort to every sorrow, who shows in the completeness of his own selfless loving the way to true peace and happiness. We can know for sure that it must be love that drives him, and yet we realise that we have still not come to the fountainhead of what impels him when we find him forgiving in the face of rejection, patient and full of tenderness when he meets with misunderstanding, yet towering in anger when his Father is slighted or his poor oppressed ones exploited and despised. What was it, then, that drove him to pour out his human existence so as to bring happiness and meaning to the life of each person who came to him with even a glimmering of trust?

The answer must surely lie in the discourse of Jesus after his feeding the five thousand:

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. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day. (John 6.37-39)

Once we are alerted to the truth of this underlying and all-embracing aspiration, and to the realisation that the core and centre, the mainspring and driving power, of the Heart of Jesus was, and is, his limitless and unwavering love for his Father, we discover on practically every page of the gospels the shining imprint of a Heart utterly devoted to the one whose infinite love embraces all of creation. If we contemplate the Sacred Heart of Christ solely in terms of the generosity of his love for us, wonderful and almost incredible as that is, we have hardly begun to know the Son who said:

I do nothing of myself; what the Father has taught me is what I preach; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him. (John 8.28-29).

It is that love between Father and Son, as it is unveiled for us in the gospels, that we hope to consider humbly and prayerfully in our next chapter.

2. ALL I HAVE IS YOURS

No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has made him known (*John 1.18*)

We were reflecting on the stupendous self-giving and self-emptying of the Incarnation, the breathtaking compassion of the Heart of the Word made flesh and his setting no limits to what he would give of himself to raise us up with himself to newness of life. And we came

to see that 'the core and centre, the mainspring and driving power, of the Heart of Jesus was, and is, his limitless and unwavering love for his Father'. It is that love which we beg to contemplate today.

I remember that I was mildly shocked when I first read the words, 'Jesus Christ was totally in love with his heavenly Father'. Yet, as time went on, and the living Christ revealed himself more and more clearly in the Jesus of the Gospel, there could be no doubt that here was the key to his life and to his Heart. What, after all, do we mean by 'in love'? Shed the sexual and emotional connotations that people generally associate with that expression and what it signifies is the height of that total giving of self by one person to another, absorption in another, in which that person finds absolute fulfilment and joy. And that, in our humanly imperfect way, describes his relationship with the Father which Jesus reveals to us through the Gospels.

Put aside for the moment the fact that here we are speaking about the incarnate Son of God, and see how in the Gospels, especially that of John, the whole being of the man Jesus is devoted to the Father. ***'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 ***'all I have is yours and all you have is mine'*** (John 17.10) tell the whole story of his human life. And then we look beyond, peering into the mystery of the eternal Trinity where, guided by the words of Jesus himself, we perceive as 'through a glass darkly' the absolute loving which is the eternal reality of God, that infinite reality which the incarnate Word came to reveal to us in finite ways that we could learn to understand. It is in the response of Christ to this infinite loving that we find the driving power, in human terms, of his supremely compassionate Heart.

Before we listen to some of the words of Jesus himself speaking about his relationship with his Father, we need to remind ourselves that in no way does he at any time deny the truth of his humanity. He is a man like us in all things but sin because, as Paul tells us in Philippians, ***'he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are'***. Yet he knew, certainly towards the end of his life on earth, that his unique Sonship was such that he could say, ***'the Father and I are one'*** (John 10.30), and ***'to have seen me is to have seen the Father'*** (John 14.9) so that throughout his life his human will was rooted in the will of the Father.

It is not by way of analysis that we arrange the sayings of Jesus, but rather to let the convergence of his various statements bring us to a fuller realisation of how absolutely he was devoted to his Father and how central and essential to his being was the Father's love.

First, of course, in describing a relationship is the intimacy of the knowledge one has of the other, and here we have the assurance of Jesus himself:

No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Matt 11.25-27).
I know him because I have come from him (John 7.29)
I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father (John 10.14-15).

Next is the complete trust one has in the love of the other, in the Father's relating to Jesus, a love declared at his Baptism and Transfiguration -- 'my Son, the Beloved', 'Listen to him' -- and recognised and responded to all through his life:

Whatever the Father does the Son does too. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does himself (***John 5.20***).

The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to him (***John 3.35***).

The Father himself loves you for loving me (***John 16.27***)

Anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father (***John 10.21***).

Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of those who stand round me (***John 11.41-42***).

And, of course, in his moment of dying:

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (***Luke 23.46***).

The Father's is a love not just to be admired and wondered at, but to be imitated by anyone who wishes to be his true son or daughter :

I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike...You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect (***Matt 5.44-48***).

Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate (***Luke 6.36***).

And no one who reads the parable of the Prodigal Son can doubt the enormous admiration and love that Jesus had for his own Father whom he called in his prayer by the intimate child's name of 'Abba'.

So how does Jesus describe his response to this love of his Father? We have to say that it is nothing less than a total self-giving. He lived and died, and rose again, in complete dedication to the mission given him by the Father. We use the word 'obedient', and in his human existence the word is true of Jesus ('the Father is greater than I'), but in the light of the eternal decision of the Holy Trinity, the shared will of Father and Son, we can discern something of the infinite love which inspired each uniting of his human will with the will of the Father:

What the Father has taught me is what I preach; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him (***John 8.28-29***).

My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to complete his work (***John 4.34***).

I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day (***John 6.38-39***).

And in the Garden, 'Abba (Father)!' he said, 'Everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it (Luke 14.36).

United with the Father in such loving compliance, Jesus spoke openly about his total dependence on his Father's generosity and co-operation. Before making decisions, such as the choosing of the Apostles (Luke 6.12), he would spend the night in prayer, and to the Father he attributed all the power and wisdom of his mind and Heart :

My teaching is not from myself; it comes from the one who sent me (*John 7.16*).

As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me (*John 6.57*).

I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing (*John 5.19*).

What I have spoken does not come from myself; no, what I was to say, what I had to speak, was commanded by the Father who sent me, and I know that his commands mean eternal life. And therefore what the Father has told me is what I speak (*John 12.49-50*).

Even in the days of his pre-Paschal existence, Jesus could say, ‘All that the Father has is mine’ (John 16.15), and ‘believe in the work I do; then you will know for sure that the Father is in me and I am in the Father (John 10.38). But he longed to be taken into the fulness of the Father’s embrace, even through the shadows of death:

There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over (*Luke 12.50*).

I shall remain with you for only a short time now; then I shall go back to the one who sent me (*John 7.33*).

Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world was (*John 17.5*).

It is in that last sentence, early in the Priestly Prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper, that we come closest to grasping the mystery of the Heart of Christ and the wonder of his redeeming love. He has already declared that his own glory consists in glorifying the Father, ‘and through the power over all mankind that you have given him, let him give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him’. He has ‘emptied himself’ to come from the Father, has laboured and given himself, and is now prepared to die in agony, for this: that by uniting his Father’s beloved children, and all creation, with his total self-giving and his passing from mortality to newness of life, he might bring to his Father, to share in the very life of the Divine Persons, the family united in love which was the aim and purpose of Creation.

3. THE SPIRIT, HEART OF HIS HEART

We have seen that the will of the Father and the purpose of his Son in his creating us, and in his sharing our humanity in total self-giving, is to enable us to share with him in the very life of the Divine Persons. At once we find that our seeking to know the Heart of Christ, and our realising that the key lies in his completely loving relationship with his Father, leads us to the Holy Spirit who personifies that relationship.

In our human way, we tend to identify the Holy Spirit by his gifts to us and so to look first for the ways in which those gifts go hand in hand with the self-giving of the Heart of Christ. Since the Spirit is the *Power* of God’s loving, and the redeeming work of Christ is the *action* of God’s loving, the gifts and the self-giving could not be more closely related. But then we come to understand that we have been looking from the all too human viewpoint of ‘what do you have for me?’ before asking the more important ‘help me to know you, especially in

relation to the Heart of Christ'. We also realise that, in our prayers and hymns honouring the Holy Spirit, this pragmatic angle does seem to predominate.

Even in the great liturgical hymn, 'Come, Holy Spirit', it is only in the sixth verse, after all the praise of gifts received from the Spirit, that we hear *'thee, the Spirit of them both'* to match the title, 'Creator', in the first line. In the Third Eucharistic Prayer there are three references to the Spirit -- *'by the working of the Holy Spirit'* and *'by the power of your Spirit'*, but then comes new light in *'that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ'*. We are still talking about what the Spirit does for us but, taken with the trinitarian words *'in the unity of the Holy Spirit'*, this directs us to *unity* as the key to some understanding of the truth: who the Spirit is in himself; and of the further truth: how the Spirit is related to the Heart of Christ.

In his encyclical, *The Third Millennium* (#44), Pope John Paul writes of the Spirit, *'who, in the absolute mystery of the Triune God, is the Person-love'*. The God we adore and serve does not dwell in solitary splendour, aloof and self-absorbed. On the contrary, he has revealed his inner life as a life of total self-giving. God is Love, says John, and he is telling of the truth of God's eternal Being.

Love infinite and eternal

Such is the Father's love that his divine glory in all eternity consists in his total self-giving to the Son. The Son responds by giving himself totally in return, and his divine glory in all eternity consists in this loving response. And this mutual love of Father and Son is so perfect, so infinitely 'real', that the love itself is a divine Person, the Spirit of love, the unifying Power of the Trinity and therefore the power that draws towards the divine unity all the diversity of creation.

In contemplating the life of the Son in the Holy Trinity, we spoke of 'the absolute loving which is the eternal reality of God, that infinite reality which the incarnate Word came to reveal to us'. And later we heard from his own words that his mission was not only to *reveal* God's eternal life of divine Persons united in love, but to bring us with himself into *sharing* that life, the life which he won for us in his Resurrection and which, we realise now, is nothing other than our being filled with the Holy Spirit. He made this clear on that Easter evening when he came to his Apostles for the first time as the Risen Lord and greeted them: *'Receive the Holy Spirit'*. It was for this that he died and rose.

Love poured out in our hearts

The prophet Ezekiel foretold something of this in his Messianic vision of a new level of life when God would put his spirit in those whose hearts were renewed, and Jesus himself had referred to this when he promised at the Feast of Tabernacles that from his heart would flow fountains of living water (John 7.38) to which John adds, *'He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive'* when Jesus was glorified. Then at the Last Supper he spoke more directly to the apostles:

'I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you'. (John 14.16-17)

Later he spoke those words which must have stunned the apostles, ***'it is for your own good that I am going because unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you'***. Not only did the giving of the Spirit depend on the dying and rising of Jesus, but his presence, the indwelling Person who ***'will lead you to the complete truth'***, is to be the inner power giving life and growth to the new Body described by Jesus, ***'I am the Vine, you are the branches'***. That infinite love of God which comes to us in the human Heart of Christ is poured out in our hearts and in his Church as the divine power of the Spirit he has won for us so that we might become alive with God's own life of loving.

As we assimilate this truth more and more deeply, we discover new wonders in those gifts of the Spirit which can seem so less precious than they really are when we fail to recognise them as this divine Person's actual sharing of himself with us. And this sharing of himself has to be at the same time a drawing of us into the glory of Christ, into the very life of God, eternal life. In Galatians 4, St Paul writes about the basic and essential gift: *'The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, "Abba, Father", and it is this that makes you a son'*. And this is true of all his gifts. His gift of peace is a sharing of himself for our sharing in the peace of God. And so with his gifts of joy, patience and the rest. We marvel when we see a great statesman giving his time to romp with little children, but we have an infinitely greater marvel here, and it is not a reluctant condescension but his delight in being the love of Christ in the hearts of the brothers and sisters of Christ.

Uniting and outgiving

The life of the Holy Spirit has been compared to the dual action of the heart in the human body, diastole when the blood is drawn into the chambers of the heart, and systole when it is thrust out to the arteries. The Holy Spirit is the principle of unimaginable unity in the Trinity of the divine Persons, Love drawing eternal infinities into One. And he is the principle of love poured out, of creative life-giving -- 'God's spirit hovered over the water' in his creating, and 'the Holy Spirit will come upon you' to Mary in his re-creating. Always he is love outgiving so as to draw all that is loved into the heart and centre, the Heart of Christ, where new life and love are generated for renewed self-giving. In all that we learn of the Spirit there is this double movement, unifying as the Apostles were drawn into close comradeship with Christ, and outgoing as the power to witness, whom they received to send them to the world.

It is in the Letters of St Paul that we discover untold riches of revelation through which we can come to a wondering intimacy with the Holy Spirit both in his inwardness and in his empowering for witness. For instance, there is chapter 8 of Romans where we hear, *'the Spirit of God has made his home in you'*, and, *'the Spirit himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God'* and later, *'The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words'*. In the First Letter to the Corinthians (2.10-12) we meet a few verses that deserve a lot of pondering: *'the Spirit*

reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God. After all, the depths of a man can only be known by his own spirit, not by any other man, and in the same way the depths of God can only be known by the Spirit of God. Now instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us'. And in the third chapter of Ephesians there is the prayer, 'Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith'.

Jesus himself had told his Apostles before his Ascension, ***'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth'*** (Acts 1.8) -- a promise that extended his gift to all who would follow them. And so we find Paul writing to the Thessalonians (1.5,6), *'when we brought the Good News to you, it came to you not only as words, but as power and as the Holy Spirit and as utter conviction...and it was with the joy of the Holy Spirit that you took to the gospel, in spite of the great opposition all round you'*. As a last example we turn to Paul's second Letter to Timothy (1.14): *'You have been trusted to look after something precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us'*.

Heart of his Heart

When John on Calvary witnessed the blood and water flowing from the pierced heart of Jesus, the richness of the symbolism and the infinite riches of what was symbolized were not lost on him. This was the climax of Christ's redeeming and the pledge of all that he had promised -- the blood of his humanity sacrificed and sacramental in a New Covenant, and the water for the outpouring of the Spirit to bring into being a new creation, his own new incarnation, the Church. It is in our opening the depths of our hearts to the power and the prompting of the Spirit dwelling within us that we become more and more deeply united with the Heart of Christ as he draws us into that sharing in the life of God which grows, from the adoption of our Baptism through the nourishment of the Eucharist, to the fullness of our sharing with him in the life of the Spirit.

4. THE HEART OF THE REDEEMER

In his Resurrection Christ has revealed the God of merciful love, precisely because he accepted the Cross as the way to the Resurrection. And it is for this reason that -- when we recall the Cross of Christ, his Passion and death -- our faith and hope are centred on the Risen One.

Pope John Paul II, On the Mercy of God #8

A question we have to ask ourselves when we ponder deeply on the working out of our salvation is this: Was Jesus himself in need of redemption? Our instinct is to give a decided No. However fully human, he was entirely without personal sin and therefore, we may think, beyond any need to be redeemed. But in fact the point turns, not on his personal sinlessness, but on his being fully human. The truth of the Incarnation lies in the dual role of the Son of

God -- he became one of us to win for us the blessings of salvation, but being one of us meant his sharing completely in our exiled human condition, longing to 'return to the Father'.

So we are talking about an involvement on the part of Christ which went far beyond a magnificent gesture, however costly, and which culminated in a self-giving sacrifice by which his humanity was so totally offered in love that on Calvary only love remained and 'salvation' was his being plunged, in dying, into the embrace of the Father and becoming in his humanity what he was as the eternal Son, filled with the Spirit and living wholly by the love of the Father.

For their sake I consecrate myself

In St John's Gospel, we often find Jesus making a brief explanatory comment before his more important actions. So, on the eve of his death, he makes a solemn prayer -- *'for them do I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth'* -- he offered himself in immolation. But why 'sanctify'? Is he not holy already? Though consecrated from the beginning, he sought always a more complete union with his Father, making his life a journey to the Father, because through his Incarnation he entered our condition of isolation, lack of glory, that experience of separation from God and his fellow-men which was our unredeemed state. In St Paul's words, he became sin for our sake, entering into the whole of our human predicament, a man like us in all things but for the absolute union of his will with that of the Father. It was a state built into the wretchedness of men and women, powerless of themselves to rise to the life-giving holiness of God.

God loved the world so much...

To rescue us from that, a 'ransom' from outside of us, a price paid in place of us, was not enough. What was needed was not a transaction but a transformation. It is true that the dying of Jesus is rightly referred to as ransom for sin, but this is an incomplete analogy, and in the light of overwhelming scriptural evidence we have to see it as a partial illustration of a much greater mystery. We had to be reconciled to God, not God to us. Any idea that God's anger had to be placated and 'bought off' is untenable in the light of John 3.16 where Jesus tells Nicodemus, *'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...'* St Paul provides a clue to the truth in I Cor 15.17 when he declares, 'If Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins'. The Cross, as the Pope says, was accepted by Jesus as the way to the Resurrection, and redemption is the new life of his Resurrection which he won so as to share it with us. Salvation is that sharing in a new relationship of loving union with Christ in the union of the Trinity and with one another which is the Risen Life of Christ. We need go no further than John 15 to discover a wonderful illustration of this in the words of Jesus: *'I am the Vine; you are the branches'*. It is, as Paul says, a new creation, an entering with Christ into the life of God's fellowship, the life of the Spirit which, in contrast to the life of the flesh (unredeemed existence) is holiness and loving and self-giving because it is a communion of life with God who is Love.

The first of the redeemed

The stupendous wonder of redemption is the unassailable fact that the Son of God entered into this 'condition of the flesh' so that he could be drawn out of it to enter, as man, into that total communion with the Father in the life of the Trinity and, as life-giving spirit, to draw along

with him those who accept him in faith and love. As we believe that 'the Word became flesh' so we have to accept that in redeeming he became the first of the redeemed. Taking to himself a human heart in which and from which to love us all, he took on himself a frail existence filled with mortal weakness, as far from the Father as the distance between our power and the infinite power of God. He took to himself (Romans 8.3) a body as physical as any sinful body, and in that body God condemned sin, the power and work of 'the life of the flesh'. So, through his willing acceptance out of love for us, the action of redemption was first accomplished in Christ's own person. He had to cry out to his Father (Heb. 5.7) to save him, not from death but out of death. He longed for his 'baptism'; he yearned to go to the Father. And this was to be by a total disowning of self, a complete dispossessing of everything in him that did not yet live for God.

A personal dedication

On the day before his death, Jesus prayed, '*Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world was*' (John 17.5), but that glory was to come through a purifying, an immolating of the flesh itself in his desire to be possessed totally by the Father -- a personal dedication by which he was to renounce his existence according to the flesh and submit himself to the life-giving holiness of God flooding his entire being. His own illustration of this was the wheat grain which, to bring forth new life, must yield itself to a process of 'dying' (John 12.23-24).

Life-giving Spirit

The whole person of Christ is involved -- death is the hour of his filial destiny, his passing from this world to the Father (John 13.1). In death he is 'lifted up from the earth' to the presence of God and becomes completely, as man, what he is eternally, Son of God, so that the glorifying death is the supreme moment of the Incarnation. From this moment, God's saving will -- to bring humankind into union with himself -- is realised to an infinite degree in Christ. And, being filled totally with the Spirit, he becomes the source of the Spirit for all his brothers and sisters (I Cor. 15.45). The blood and water flowing from the pierced Heart of the Crucified are no mere picturesque imagery but express the reality of the outpouring of the Spirit promised by Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7.37-39) and released by his surrender to total loving. It is for that reason, rather than any morbid glorification of suffering for its own sake, that at the centre of our Sacred Heart spirituality is the pierced Heart of Christ. If for us it is the Paschal Heart, the Easter Heart of the Saviour, we find in it not less love but more. His death was his gift of love to his Father and to us which opened the way, like the piercing of the lance, to the fulness and the outpouring of eternal Love, the life of the Spirit.

An eternal moment

The moment of Redemption was, in fact, the moment of Christ's glorification. It could not be otherwise since his death and the glory of Easter, the embrace of his Father's infinite love, are two sides of one reality. The completeness of his self-giving love, expressed in the surrender of his dying into his Father's arms, was his glorification, and this was Redemption, the new life which came first to Christ himself and then to all those for whom he suffered and died and was glorified through their being grafted into that eternal moment. The moment of Christ's Passover is an eternal moment. He did not die into the succeeding moments of time but into

the great Now of eternity so that the Jesus who died at a certain historical moment is now the Christ forever giving himself into the embrace of the Father and forever being raised up as life-giving, Spirit-sharing Saviour. The Sacred Heart is not an icon to be merely gazed on and admired. In it there is nothing impersonal, static or remote. It is the dynamic presence in our lives of the Heart of Christ so consumed with love that he is giving himself eternally as man to share with us here and now the life of his Sonship as God.

Newness of life

A spirituality which focuses on the Sacred Heart of Christ, then, is far removed from sentimentality and feeble mawkishness. It is the distilled expression of that spirituality of Redemption which is the deepest reality of our Christian life. In Romans 6 St Paul has this to say: *'You have been taught that when we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized in his death; in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might walk in newness of life'*. As Christ lives eternally in the act of his redeeming, in the unrepeatable moment of his dying into the new life of the Spirit, so our lives are to be caught up in that moment so as to be a continual dying to self-love and growing in union with the selfless loving of Christ. *'If a man serves me, he must follow me'*, said Jesus, *'where I am, my servant will be there too'*. To follow him is to take up our cross, but he said too, *'If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him'*. He is our Way, our Truth and our Life and the salvation he offers is a dying to the world of self-centredness and being raised again with him. It is a salvation available to all mankind in Christ since, *'having been made perfect, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation (Heb. 5.9)*.

Cells of his Body

However, if salvation involves so personal a relationship with Christ one may ask what role is played by the Church founded by him to be the channel of salvation to all people. The answer lies in the prayer of Jesus to his Father at the Last Supper. He prayed that his followers would be one as he and the Father are one -- completely one, so that the world might realise that he was sent by the Father. It is the oneness of life shared with him which Jesus prefigured in the imagery of the Vine, and which Paul portrayed vividly in his teaching about the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church as the Incarnation of Christ extended in time so that all of us are living cells of this Body, animated with the one Spirit won for us by Christ's redeeming. It follows that the Church is incorporated into Christ in the one eternal moment of his being glorified by the Father. The Church's union with Christ, therefore, implies not simply a union of being and of life, but a mysterious communion in his death and glorification. It would be an incomplete theology of the Mystical Body which did not present the Church as the Body of the **Paschal** Christ -- of Christ in the act of dying and being glorified, the Christ of the pierced Heart whence the Spirit never ceases to be poured out on redeemed humanity.

Alive by the power of his Heart

So Christ's Body, which is the Church, is not a static reality nor is it an impersonal institution, but rather an organism alive by the power of his Heart and one with him in the action of his total self-giving which opens up humanity, first in him and then in us, to the action of the Spirit and the gift of his newness of life. Only in his Heart, then, the summit of human loving,

where he gives himself to the Father for mankind and the Father gives himself in return, does Christ unite himself with the Church in a new quasi-Incarnation so that each of her members comes alive with the dynamic life which he has infused into his Church to complete his mission and make of humanity a community of love.

A paschal existence

Redeemed humanity, therefore, is not simply humanity pardoned from afar, enriched by an extrinsic gift of 'merits', not even simply humanity remade and given renewed life through a passive receiving of new powers. Redeemed humanity is man united in Christ's self-giving, identified with him in all the loving movements of his Heart, growing more and more to be like God in selfless loving as he moves through his extended sharing in the one eternal moment of Christ's redeeming act. We lead a paschal existence, going forward as the pilgrim Church by way of all our little dyings to the goal of life itself. We do not die for the sake of dying -- Jesus himself said that he laid down his life in order to take it up again (John 10.17) -- but all our dying to self, however apparently trivial or transitory, is meant to be paschal, a dispossessing only to be more possessed as a new creation in the Heart of Christ. St Paul, of course says it all perfectly: 'Always, wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body' (II Cor. 4.10).

5. THE HEART OF THE EUCHARIST

A few years ago millions, all over the world, were gazing at the cinema screen engrossed in a graphic reconstruction of the past, the 1912 sinking of the Titanic. More or less the same millions, I suppose, watched on their television screens the funeral of Princess Diana, not as a past event but as it was actually happening. And millions of us took part personally and actively in the first truly democratic elections here in South Africa. Three levels of actuality and three levels of participation and involvement, all rich with action, human feelings and identification. We shall never appreciate fully Christ's Heart in the Eucharist until we realise that in the Mass, which we take so much for granted, we are present and involved at all three of these levels in the greatest happening of all time.

It is right that we should speak of the Eucharist in terms of Presence and Food as we do when we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi. But when we affirm that the Mass is Christ's Sacrifice we speak, too, of his making present to us the act of generous self-giving which has won for us this banquet. It is on this 'making present' that we are reflecting here. The human mind can never come near to grasping the wonder of God's love given to us in the redeeming action of Christ and the self-giving of his Heart. But we know from the earliest account of the Last Supper (I Cor. 11.25) that Jesus himself pointed the way when he said, *'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me'*.

Memorial and Covenant

The Eucharist is not a 'thing' to be studied but an action to be performed, and an action with a specific purpose. Whatever the word 'memorial' may usually mean to us, in the minds of the Apostles at the Supper it stood for the annual Passover feast at which each new generation of the Jewish people took their place in the life of the Covenant. It was not a mere memory of a past event but the re-living of a dedication in which everyone was to share and be bonded in a special relationship with God and with his people.

With this as his context, and recalling his words after the feeding of the thousands, *'the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world'* (John 6.51), Jesus raises the Covenant to a new level: *'Do this as a memorial of ME'*, as a memorial of my living body given for you, my heart's blood poured out for you, the blood of the New Covenant: Take and eat; take and drink. His pledge, *'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him'* (John 6.56) is his fulfilling of the covenantal bonding with the life of God, as Jesus already offers the total self-giving which will be completed the next day on Calvary in his dying into the new life of Resurrection.

What we have to try to grasp is that the Eucharist is not only our receiving this stupendous gift, but is our being made present at, and participating in, all of this sacrificial and unifying action which flows with infinite loving from the Heart of Christ.

Two levels of being

Immediately we run into the difficulty that what we perceive in the Eucharist with our senses is the sign, bread and wine which might be considered no more than a symbol. So we turn to the Gospel of John, who not only narrates but also commentates from a post-Easter viewpoint. From him we learn that Jesus continually spoke of two levels of being and two levels of understanding. From Nicodemus in chapter 3 to Thomas in chapter 20, people insist on seeing with the eyes of the flesh while Jesus insists that genuine reality is at a deeper level – the reality of the 'living water' that he offers the Samaritan woman is the life of the Spirit; the 'true Vine' which he describes to the Apostles is the living Body of all the faithful united in a sharing of life with himself. And so the true bread, the bread of life, is his own living self, alive and self-giving as he is in his eternal reality. The sign of eating and drinking signifies the deeper truth of our being joined with him in a unifying act by which we share in his life.

Eternally present

At first sight that would seem to present us with a further difficulty. The film about the Titanic is not just a mere portrayal of an historical event, but it is at the further remove of belonging to the past. Have we solved the problem of 'mere sign' only to find ourselves separated from the reality of Christ's redeeming by the passage of time? Are we united indeed with the Christ of glory but far removed from the moment of his sacrifice and

glorification which made our sharing possible? If that were so, we could hardly speak of the Mass as sacrifice. But it is not so. In our temporal scheme of things, we know that at a certain moment, a little under two thousand years ago, Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross outside Jerusalem. We know too, from our faith, that this death was the beginning of his new life or, more accurately, it was the entering of his humanity on his eternal life as Son. He died into eternity.

It will be helpful for us to remind ourselves here of some lines from our earlier chapter, *The Heart of the Redeemer*:

The moment of Christ's Passover is an eternal moment. He did not die into the succeeding moments of time but into the great Now of eternity so that the Jesus who died at a certain historical moment is now the Christ forever giving himself into the embrace of the Father and forever being raised up as life-giving, Spirit-sharing Saviour.

At once, any idea of the Eucharist as a static remote object of worship gives way to the realisation that here we have the dynamic reality of Christ's saving action. He does not ask us merely to look back into the past to an event which exists only in memory. The outward and visible happenings of that historic event are not to be relegated to unimportance -- they help us to understand and appreciate so much -- but in the Eucharist, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we become present with the Christ of now, the Christ of his Paschal Moment in the eternal dynamism of his infinite self-giving and of his being infinitely Spirit-filled. The Mass is indeed a sacrificial action because Christ's one offering of himself, belonging to the timeless order of eternity, is available for our worship at any point of our time. In the deeper reality of eternity the words from the Cross have just been spoken and he has only now bowed his head. The blood and water are flowing now from his pierced Heart since the Spirit has come now to humanity in the outpouring of the Father's love.

So the Eucharist is not only 'real' in the sense that it is not just a symbolic representation but also it is 'happening now'. The Supper offering and the dying-into-life are one stupendous love-gift, the prayer of Christ's total self-giving in action, at which he invites us to be present and to be united with him in our own self-offering. Important as we know the liturgical ambience to be, the singing of the Lord's praises, the exercising of ministries and the active participation of the people, all of these fade to insignificance beside the real action which takes place as we gather to hear, *'This is my body given for you'*, knowing that he is giving himself now, and in some unfathomable way that turning point in human history, God's raising of humanity in Jesus to his own life of the Spirit, is presented to us here, his daily gift.

We are participants

That leaves us with our third level of actuality, that of participation and involvement, but here the words that spring to mind almost speak for themselves -- banquet and sacrifice, communion and covenant, oblation and consecration. The Covenant sacrifice of Exodus 24 was above all a communion sacrifice uniting God and his people, and in offering himself as the paschal lamb Jesus was emphasizing this. So it is not surprising that when, for instance, he spoke of his self-offering in the imagery of the seed dying to provide a harvest, he should add, *'wherever I am, my servant will be there too'* (John 12.26) and, at the Last Supper, *'For*

their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth' (John 17.19). His sacrifice is not his alone but all of us who partake of his Eucharist share in his action so that we too may be sanctified with his gift of the Spirit. In this sharing we become one Church, one as the bread is one, a faith community which receives and expresses its identity in the breaking of the bread.

A gift for unity

So the Eucharist is the gift for unity of the Heart of Christ, but it is also a challenge from his Heart to every one of us. The original Passover and Covenant were basically a challenge from God to what was unloving and unjust in the world. The Eucharist is that challenge carried by Christ, through the total unselfing of this, his sacrifice, to the world of every age. And at the same time it is the table at which those who witness to that challenge are sustained. The power of the Eucharist is to break down our habitual self-centred attitudes not only by our hearing the Good News proclaimed, but also because we find ourselves united, as members of a community (a single body because we all have a share in this one bread – I Cor 10.17), with him who gave his life for the reign of justice and love. The challenge of Christ's Heart in the Eucharist is to let this power be at work in our hearts and produce in us its intended effects, so that we may become ready to put at risk what we tend to cling to, and so be true to that law of love which is the reign of God.

In our celebrating the Eucharist, this law of love is not just our receiving a command or even just a model for imitation. Rather we are to enter into a communion of life in which we are empowered by the active redeeming presence of Christ through the power of the Spirit won for us by him. In a sense the Eucharist is the Church. Paul had called 'the Body of Christ' the communion of life between the Lord and those who believed in him -- as we share in his eucharistic bread we, the many, are united with Christ, becoming his body on earth. First, by the action of the Spirit, there is the communion with Christ enjoyed by that Body, his Church, which has received the gifts of redemption and, at the same time, through that, a communion is created between us the participants, meant to become what humanity was created to be, and has been redeemed to be, a universal community of love.

6. A HEART FOR GIVING

The same Martin Luther King Jr. who made the famous 'I have a dream' speech had said two months earlier, 'If a man hasn't discovered something he will die for, he isn't fit to live'. The same Jesus who urged us, '*Set your hearts on his kingdom first' said, 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'*'. If we are to grow in knowledge of his heart we have to try to discover what was the treasure which he sought, what was the kingdom which he longed for and was ready to die for.

The promise of wholeness

Ultimately, of course, what Jesus sought above all was to do all that his Father wanted, but next we ask what did the Father want so much that he exposed his Son to our human slights

and cruelty? The shorthand answer, 'Salvation for us', is absolutely true but unfortunately is open to a variety of meanings. There are those for whom salvation means roughly 'getting people to toe the line', others who would say 'making a return to God for what he has given' or 'using God's gifts as he intended' and so on. One can find scriptural support for each of these answers but each is a mere fragment of the truth -- all of them assume that God needs something from us whereas the truth is that God is pure Giver; we have nothing to give that can make him more complete. If he asks for anything from us it is to make us whole; if he longs for our love it is so that he may pour out the wholeness of love into open hearts; if he asks for our lives it is so that he may give us his own fullness of life. Can it be, then, that Salvation means some wholeness of living which is perfect loving relationship? Can this be the Kingdom, God's dream for us? Let us see what we can gather from some of God's promises in the Old Testament which Jesus came to fulfil.

You will be my people

All that was implied in God's choice of Abraham and in his promise of a multitude of descendants came to its first fruition in the events of the Exodus. God spoke to Moses (Exod. 5.1-8) not only telling how he would free the sons of Israel from slavery in Egypt, but promising, *'I will adopt you as my own people, and I will be your God'*. Then, after they were freed, preparing them for the Covenant, God said (Exod. 19.5) *'From this you know that now, if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my very own for all the earth is mine'*. The whole story is one of God's tender care for his people, of the signs he gave of his accompanying them, and of his infinite patience in forgiving and healing their failings.

Why such generosity? Moses told them (Deut. 7.7): *'If Yahweh set his heart on you and chose you, it was not because you outnumbered other peoples; you were the least of all peoples. It was for love of you and to keep the oath he swore to your fathers...'* He chose this people, as he chose the human race, to be the recipients of his freely given love. He chose them so that he might love them into such unity and justice that they might become a light to all the nations, revealing God's love and restoring humanity to be truly sons and daughters in the one family of the Lord.. So Isaiah, *'I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth'* (Is 49.6), and Zechariah, looking forward to the day of the Messiah, *'Many nations will join Yahweh on that day; they will become his people'* (Zech 2.11). More and more, as God's plan is revealed we come to see that salvation lies in the realm of relationship - a life-giving, love-giving extravagance of generosity on the part of God, asking of his people only that, through reciprocal love of him and of one another, they be open to receive his gift and to share it by radiating his love.

Happy the man who puts his trust in you

All this becomes clearer as we read or, better, pray the Psalms or reflect on the great prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The full revealing by Jesus of God's loving purpose is still centuries away and we are not to be surprised to find mention still of a vengeful God or of his destroying his enemies, but the voice of tender loving is heard more insistently and the promise of closer and more intimate union with the Lord who is Shepherd and unfailing Friend. In the Psalms, for instance: *'All day long I hope in you because of your goodness, Yahweh'* (25); *'I seek Yahweh and he answers me and frees me from all my fears'*(34); *'I*

stayed in your presence; you held my right hand' (73); 'Yahweh is tender and compassionate, slow to anger, most loving' (103); 'You stretch your hand out and save me...your love is everlasting' (138); and 'Yahweh acts only out of love, standing close to all who invoke him' (145).

Then in the Prophets we hear God's great Messianic promises: *'Lift up your eyes and look around: all are assembling and coming towards you, your sons from far away and your daughters being tenderly carried' (Is 60.4); 'through him [the Servant of Yahweh] what Yahweh wishes will be done' (Is 53.10); 'Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts Then I will be their God and they shall be my people' (Jer 31.33); 'The Lord Yahweh says this, "I am going to look after my flock myself and keep all of it in view...I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong' (Ezek 34.11,16); 'I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you and make you keep my laws and sincerely respect my observances' (Ezek 36.27).*

I have come so that they may have life

In these and many similar texts we see set out the mission of Jesus, the goal on which he set his Heart. He is to bring a salvation which is the gift of unconditional love and which will create a firm bond of love between God and his people; it will bring peace and unity, 'gathering' the exiles and the strays; the new relationship will be personal, interior, in the heart, and will involve a renewal of spirit; it will aim especially to raise up the broken and the weak, the poor and the disabled, while the power of the proud and arrogant will be brought low. All this constituted the dream, the treasure on which Jesus set his Heart and described the kingdom, the reign of God, which he lived and died to bring to pass for all his flock. It involved for him, and still involves for us who follow him, a dying; but it is a dying to all that falls short of fullness of life so that real life, the life of God's Spirit, may fill our being.

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me

In the early days of his Public Life, Jesus returned to the town where he had grown up and, invited to speak in the synagogue on the Sabbath, he read from Isaiah, *'the spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor...'* Luke 4.18-19). From the very start his hand is stretched out in forgiveness and healing to raise up the needy and the weak and restore them to full fellowship in the community. He was not a wonder-worker in the sense that he performed miracles to prove his power. He responded to suffering with compassion but nearly every healing or feeding was, in the word of St John, a sign - a sign of the salvation which he had come to bring to everyone.

It is worth noting how often Jesus healed blind people, and deaf, and lepers, all with afflictions which set up barriers between the sufferer and society. He had come to break down the barriers which sin and suffering had created between his people and to create instead a community of love. First there would be a right relationship of loving reverence with the

Father, a sharing in his own intention always to please the Father, and this would issue in determination to express this in loving service to one another. This would be the Kingdom, brought to perfection in his own humanity by his complete self-giving, and striven after by his followers with all the help and support that union with him in the Spirit would provide.

Life to the full

The gospel message is a promise of a new future, a leap of life which is beyond our human achieving, carrying, as we do, the weight of our past; but the way to new life lies open to us in the Heart of the Saviour. So Jesus says, *'Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light'* (Matt 11.30). He asks a lot but he promises, assures us of, everything. *'I have come'*, he says, *'so that they may have life and have it to the full'* (John 10.10), and as he describes the ways in which this life which he brings is the fulfilment of the workaday life we know, he reveals one by one facets of the real life of loving relationship which his salvation offers - *'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me'*.

Christ offers what is real so as to bring to fulfilment all that we dream of and hope for. He is the true light of the world, the Bread of Life, the true Vine, the Good Shepherd who cares for his flock by leading them to the Living Water of the Spirit and bequeathing to them the true peace of his own dwelling with the Father. *'If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him'* (John 14.23). As the time for his own dying into newness of life drew near, Jesus opened his heart to his disciples, revealing the riches of the Spirit with which he was endowing them and he prayed to his Father for what was closest to his heart, *'May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me'* (John 17.21).

7. HEART OF THE COVENANT

Through his prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God had promised a new beginning for his people. He would renew his Covenant with them by means of an inner conversion of heart so that they would be truly his people, united in a new and more intimate relationship. In these and similar texts, we see set out the mission of Jesus, the goal on which he set his Heart. He is to bring a salvation which is the gift of unconditional love and which will create a firm bond of love between God and his people. In his Heart, God's wooing of his people will achieve its longed for union. By our bearing this in mind as we reflect on the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit can bring new light to bear on them and can enrich our prayer as we open our hearts to his ways.

The Old and the New

Some might argue that, as we are talking about the Heart of Jesus Christ, our title should be 'Heart of the *New* Covenant'. It is true that *'God has blessed us with all the spiritual*

blessings of heaven in Christ ' (Ephesians 1.3) through the Spirit won for us in Christ's dying into newness of life. But when we consider the earlier Covenant, which was not revoked but was made new in unimaginable sharing of life through Christ's redeeming action, we have to bear in mind what the Lord teaches us through John in the Prologue to his Gospel: that the Word, the divine Person who was the true light and life of all people, was in the world, came to his own domain, and was made flesh. The same Person who took our human nature as Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Word who spoke to his people, *'You will be my people and I will be your God'*.

In other words, God's infinite loving has been channelled to humanity through the creating wisdom of his Word from the beginning of time. So, too, through that same Word his infinite loving was wonderfully expressed in the covenants by which God showed his longing to be united with his Chosen People in a relationship of mutual loving. So, too, God's infinite loving has come to us now through the same source, the same Word, the same passion of divine longing for union with humanity, but speaking now with the intimacy of the human Heart in whom the fullness of that union, the fulfilment of all covenants, is realised. The Heart of the Person who for us is Christ is, and always has been, the heart of God's relating to his creation in whatever way he has revealed himself and has called created beings to make his love their home.

New and Eternal

One of the most surprising facts about the four Gospels is that, although Jesus is at all times speaking of the ways in which 'the Kingship of God' is to be perfected in our internal and totally self-giving relationship with the Father, he is not reported as actually mentioning the Covenant until, at the Last Supper, he says, *'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant'* (Mark 14.24) or, as St Paul relates in the earliest written account we have, *'This cup is the new covenant in my blood'* (I Cor. 11.25).

It was in the outpouring of his blood, a self-giving which he had already accepted and now offered as an eternal sacrifice, that he was to seal the new and everlasting Covenant by which those who came to him in faith would be bonded in newness of life with him and so with the Father. This was, in fact, the consummation of a life which was from the beginning covenant-centred.

He showed himself to be not only the perfect model of compassion for those in need of healing and strength, not only a witness to absolute truth and goodness, but one specifically devoted to renewing and perfecting the Covenant by means of which God had bound himself to his beloved human sons and daughters. In Genesis 12.3 God says to Abraham, 'All the tribes of the earth shall bless themselves by you', and in Isaiah we read, 'I have appointed you as covenant of the people and light of the nations' (42.6).

But the very people who had been chosen to be a light to the nations, an example drawing the rest of the human race into the family of God, had lost their way and through the legalistic rigidity and exclusiveness of their spiritual leaders, both towards those outside (Samaritans, Gentiles) and even among themselves ('sinners', those ritually 'unclean'), had ceased to reflect the all-embracing love of the Lord whose spirit they had been commissioned to proclaim.

A covenant-centred life

In the Gospel of St John, the Last Supper is mostly related as a long discourse given by Jesus, ending in his Priestly Prayer. Here, where he reveals what is closest to his Heart, he prays for unity in language which raises the covenant relationship to new and startling heights -- *'I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me'*. This bond of unity is to witness to the authenticity of his message of love. In this prayer Jesus sums up the yearning and striving of his life.

We know little about his years at Nazareth save that he lived in a situation of humble work and obscurity. But from Luke 3.41-50, his loss and finding in the Temple, we can be sure that this was a time of waiting, preparing himself for the sign and call that would come from his Father. His work would bring him into contact with the people he served around his home and he would hear their fears and complaints, their hopes and aspirations. Galilee, far from being a backwater, was a hive buzzing with ideas and plans for change. He would discover that the people of the Covenant, who should have been united as God's own nation, were split asunder not so much because of any revolutionary greed for power but rather because of the excessive legalism and exclusiveness of their leaders. Revolt against Rome was for the fanatics, but unhappiness at being so readily labelled 'sinners' for unavoidable transgressions was part of the lives of the majority.

In the whole of the public life of Jesus we can trace his longing and his efforts to heal this rift. Most of his arguments with the Scribes and his defiance of the man-made regulations which they had incorporated in 'the Law' can be seen as his attempt to break down the artificial barriers which separated 'the virtuous' -- those who could afford observance of the Law's minutiae -- and the People of the Land, the ordinary men and women who, for all their longing to please God, were despised, and might be counted ritually unclean and unfit for public worship, because their lives made such observance a luxury often beyond their reach. The externals were all that counted, and where externals were concerned the people were divided, spiritually as well as materially, into the haves and have-nots.

Good news to the Poor

John the Baptist called the leaders a 'brood of vipers'. Jesus took his place to be baptized with the 'sinners', was confirmed by his Father in a mission of saving, and withdrew to the desert to discern his way. Later, when he began his public ministry in Galilee, Jesus came to his home town, Nazareth, and speaking there in the synagogue he read from Isaiah, *'The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor...'* Then he declared, *'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen'*, and the people marvelled at his words (Luke 4.16-22).. The good news of God's love was for everyone and what mattered above all was to relate to him with the love of one's heart, and so to relate to each of his children with generous goodwill. To be poor or blind or crippled or even a leper was not a sign of God's displeasure -- his love for those who suffered and his mercy for those who sinned was without limit and he longed for each one to grow in that same acceptance of all others which alone could heal the wounds of humanity.

This was the proclamation of God's kingship with which Jesus set about the restoring and perfecting of the Covenant. It is only in the light of this campaign that we can truly appreciate the vigour of his opposition to those whom he considered the spiritual oppressors dividing his people. The incidents and the accusations occur throughout the Gospels and all that we can hope to do here is to bring them into a focus where we discover that what they share is not hostility but love, love for truth and for those whose happiness depends on their surrender to truth.

Human Regulations

Challenged for failure to respect 'the tradition of the elders', Jesus retorted, *'It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture: "This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless, the doctrines they teach are only human regulations"'* (Mark 7.1-7). Here was the nub of the conflict which was to lead eventually to his death. No doubt his denunciation of the exploiting of the poor by the priestly officials of the Temple who had turned it into 'a robbers' den' (Luke 19.45-46) played its part, and this too was a symptom of the misuse of religion in a way that divided God's people. But the heart of the matter was that Jesus put into their proper perspective the host of extensions and interpretations by which the Scribes had distorted and made a servitude of God's covenantal Law which commanded loving reverence for God and loving respect for one another.

Not all Sadducees were worldly and many Pharisees were sincere and even saintly, but their principles were flawed and their way of life, making a virtue of the separateness which their name implied, was in dire need of healing. What they could not accept was the authority which Jesus claimed in doing this, and his disregarding of the ceremonial rules which he flaunted by welcoming freely all who came to him, lepers, tax-collectors and even gentiles.

Take, for instance, the third of the ten Commandments, to keep holy the Sabbath Day. It was right and proper that those to whom the people looked for spiritual guidance should help them to know ways of honouring the Lord on his special day and, by refraining from normal work, at the same time to be refreshed for the labours of the week. But the Scribes succeeded in finding thirty nine basic actions to forbid on the Sabbath with unlimited ramifications and definitions. So Jesus, absolute in his obedience to the Law of God and faithful to the genuinely inspired interpretations and customs, did not hesitate to sweep aside mere human regulations when, for instance, it was a matter of healing on the Sabbath. 'The Sabbath', he said, 'was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath' (Mark 2.27).

To the myriad regulations which had been elaborated concerning ritual cleanliness (which had little to do with hygiene and everything to do with legal correctness) Jesus brought the same divine sanity. To touch a leper was to be unclean. When a leper came to him, 'feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him' (Mark 1.40-42). He cured the man but there was no need to touch him save to show his loving acceptance. To enter the house of a Gentile was to become unclean. When a Roman centurion sent word, asking for the healing of his servant, Jesus at once set out for his house and it was only the man's faith and sensitivity which intervened. To touch a corpse, or anything in contact with a corpse was to

be unclean. Deeply moved at Nain by the sorrow of the widow who had lost her only son, Jesus 'went up and touched the bier' and raised to life the dead man (Luke 7.11-15).

Not to abolish but to complete

It was not that Jesus scorned the Law. On the contrary, by setting interior intentions above mere external observance, and by making universal the law of charity, even to praying for those who do us harm, he deepened it and brought it to perfection. It was the tax-collector in the parable whose humble prayer was approved by God rather than the self-praise of the Pharisee. And it was the Samaritan in another who was generous in loving the stranger of whom Jesus said, "Go and do likewise". So when, on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus offered his life's blood as the sign which sealed a new Covenant, his gift of loving unity, a sharing in the life of God, was offered to all.

Jesus said of the Scribes, '*They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they*' (Matt 23.4). There was even a saying, 'the yoke of the Law'. So Jesus said, '*Shoulder my yoke and learn from me...my yoke is easy and my burden light*' (Matt 11.29-30). His yoke is the law of the New Covenant, the law of Christ's own Heart, to love one another as he has loved us so that in very truth we may be one family of the Father in covenanted union with the Son.

8. HEART OF THE CHURCH

Familiar truths often take on new life from a fresh development of an accepted analogy which in this case is the living reality of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, his presence in our world in an extended incarnation of the Word through his gift to the Church of the life of the Holy Spirit, described by the Lord in his living metaphor, '*I am the true Vine; you are the branches*' (John 15.5), and effected after his Resurrection in his fulfilling the promise of '*Mountains of living water*' (John 7.37-39). Long before Paul wrote to the Corinthians that we are one body because we all have a share in the one loaf, Jesus prayed, '*May they all be one, Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me*'.

A small volume entitled *The Episcopate and the Primacy* (1961), mostly by Karl Rahner but including some three dozen pages by one Joseph (later Cardinal) Ratzinger, now even more eminent, provided the seminal idea of this chapter. Rahner, writing just before the opening of Vatican II, is dealing with the question of the apparent contradiction between the supreme authority of the Pope over the whole Church and that of the bishops over their territorial Churches, which is also of divine right. I have no intention of going into the intricacies of that issue or of what Vatican II did about it. Enough to say that Rahner looked for his solution, not in a juridical compromise, but in the fundamental and unique relationship between the local Church and the universal Church. It was in his explanation of this relationship that I found the spark which set me off and, for the sake of brevity and clarity, I shall condense this explanation in a simplified form.

Like other societies, the Church has an ordered structure and a legal existence which persists, regardless of activity or inactivity of its members. However, being of her very nature a visible

society, and one created, not out of mere sentiment or self-interest, but for *'life more abundant'* (John 10.10), she is most actualised when, through her action - teaching, praying, celebrating and so on - she becomes a perceptible reality, what Rahner calls an 'event'. To a lesser extent this is true of the action even of a single member who is acting with her authority on the Church's behalf, but it is most true, the Church is most actualised, when she appears as a communion, 'a plurality of persons bound together by a visible occurrence and united by grace' .

So what is the reality of the Church? Her deepest reality is as the . continuing presence in our world of Christ, the incarnate Word, through the gift of the Holy Spirit which he has won for us, and by which we share in the life of God. This winning, our redeeming, was accomplished in the moment of his absolute self-emptying as he passed, as man, from our mortal existence into the eternal glory of his Father's love, an eternal moment, therefore, which he makes accessible for us at every celebration of the Eucharist, as he speaks through his Church the words of his self-giving, *'This is my body given for you'*. It is in this eternal moment, in which the Church was first actualised and in which the Lord invites us to participate day by day in his Eucharist, that the Church becomes most fully a perceptible reality, the community of all her members with their head in his act of re-creation. As F. X. Durrwell writes in his great work *The Resurrection*, 'The opening of Christian time occurs both at a date in history and in a reality that remains ever present, namely the resurrection that is in Christ' .

Rahner goes on with his argument to show that, while the Eucharist is universal, its actual celebration, 'Christ present in one congregation as the crucified and resurrected Saviour', must necessarily be localised and that, as a consequence, wherever and whenever it is celebrated, the Church 'as a whole' is acting as a community. Moreover, its 'perceptible reality' is at its height when the Eucharist is celebrated by a complete community - that is, when it is celebrated by the bishop, as successor to the Apostles, with his people. That is why our word 'Church' (the community of Christ's people) applies equally to the universal Church and to the local Church. The Church exists because the Eucharist exists, essentially universal but necessarily localised, and therefore the local Church is more than a mere agency of the universal Church. Hence the nature of the relationship of the local Church to the universal Church, and hence the nature of the relationship of the diocesan Pastor to the supreme Pastor, the successor of St Peter. I apologize for skimming Rahner's argument but, for our purposes, the main course is yet to come.

There are certain truths and analogies which one presumes are familiar to most Catholics. Such are, for instance, St Paul's teaching about the Church as the Body of Christ and the doctrine stating that Christ is wholly present in either of the species of the Eucharist. Then there is the promise of Jesus in St John's Gospel (chapter 6) that he will give himself to be food for our real life - *'My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink'* (John 6.55) - which goes hand in hand with his invitation, *'Let the man come and drink who believes in me'* (John 7.17), explained by the evangelist's words, *'He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive'*. Lastly, we have the words of Jesus at the Last Supper that we hear at every Mass - My body given for you, my blood poured out for you, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.

In my third paragraph I recalled Rahner's words, that the Church is a society whose life persists regardless of the activity or inactivity of her members, but whose reality is most actualised when she acts as a community. This is true above all in the action of the Eucharist, our sharing in Christ's eternal moment, when all are drawn into his prayer and saving action, so that the community is renewed in the life of the Holy-Spirit, the 'real life' which Christ has promised. The life is continuous but is strengthened and intensified in the Church with every celebration of the Eucharist, just as in the body our life's blood flows continually but depends on the action of the heart to be purified and revived by the oxygen coming to it from the lungs.

In Paul's inspired realisation that *'the bread that we break is a communion with the body of*

Christ, so that we, although we are many, form a single body' (I Cor 10.17), we recognise his theology of the Church as the Body of Christ, and he says too, *'the blessing-cup that we bless is a communion with the blood of Christ'*. It follows, then, that just as our blood moves through every artery, vein and capillary of our physical being, preserving and restoring the life and unity of the body, so does the Church's 'communion with the blood of Christ' carry the real life of the Spirit to the whole community. What is more, it is Christ himself in his redeeming action, made present to us wherever and whenever we are united with him in his Eucharist, who constantly refreshes and renews that life. So the Eucharist is indeed the Heart of the Church, energizing her every function with the life of the Spirit, God's infinite love consecrating her in response to the human self-giving of Christ and making eternal the New Covenant in his blood.

In fact, there is a further step we can take. As the Church for many centuries has paid great honour to the Heart of Christ, perceived as the channel of God's divine love coming to us in the humanity of Christ, we may well say that the Eucharist is the Sacrament of the Heart of Christ, the source and fount of his redeeming love for us which is eternally at work to establish and renew us in the life of his Spirit - in fact, the Heart of Christ is the heart of the Church not merely in a metaphorical sense as the core of our spiritual life, but in the utterly literal sense of our depending on its activity, Christ's paschal action, and on its power, the power of his gift of the Holy Spirit, to be alive with his real life and to be one as his Church.

I hope that this linking the Eucharist as heart with the Church as the Body of Christ will serve both to fill out and strengthen our deeper understanding of the mystery of the Church and the wonder of Christ's gift of himself as its living dynamism in the Eucharist and, through the Eucharist, in all the Sacraments where we encounter him.

Without our wishing to turn the analogy into an allegory, these thoughts can possibly underline some of the lessons of Paul's teaching on the Mystical Body. For instance the knowledge, less available to Paul, which 'we have now of the intricacies of the human body brings out more vividly the interdependence of the parts of the human anatomy and especially the key and essential role played by the heart. Where there is injury, the heart supplies the blood that brings healing. Where there is increased activity, the heart provides the greater rate of blood supply needed by the muscles. Where the life of the blood is weakened as it returns to the heart through the veins, it is the activity of the heart that refreshes and renews it by means of the air (the 'Spirit') drawn into the lungs for the limbs and organs to function well. These are but a few of the functions of the physical heart in which we can find a correspondence with the action of Christ's Eucharist in the Church, and so of our need to make Christ in his Eucharist the centre of our lives.

From all of this we understand more clearly why the bishops of Vatican II declared that the liturgy is, 'the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, and the fount from which all her power flows' (Decree on the Sacred Liturgy # 10). But that is not all, while praise and thanksgiving must fill our prayer, we have to realise more fully that our life in Christ is a truly personal relationship, not just with one another, but above all with Christ. If we are to live that relationship to the full, we have to grow in our knowledge of Jesus as he reveals his mind and heart in the Gospels, the same yesterday, today and always. Our prayer must grow in intimacy with him, so that through him it may become more and more an expression of our joyful surrender to the Father's love for us as we are united with Christ's self-giving in every celebration of his Eucharist.

9. HEART OF PRAYER

Prayer in and through Christ

Just as Jesus, in creating his parables, drew on all that was apt in the life around him, so may we look for parable material in the technology of our day. For instance, pondering on the heart of Christ as the heart of all prayer, we can see a possibility, however inadequate, in our cyber activity. The prayer of the kingdom, we might say, is like a writer wishing to communicate with his editor. All that is necessary within his computer for sending his message has been done and all that remains is to click on 'Send', but for the power to send the message to its destination he must rely on the 'server' to receive it and transmit it to the editor. In like manner, when we pray, it is through Christ who alone supplies the power of the Holy Spirit. He has told us, '*No one can come to the Father except through me*' (John 14.6). It is not that he is a barrier that we have to surmount, but that he has made himself our 'server', empowering us with the gift of the Spirit, enabling us to transcend our human limitations. Moreover, he and 'the Editor' and the Power are one, and they dwell in the heart where there is the friendship which combines trust that God will always give what is best for us and the firm resolve to do always what is pleasing to God .. Christ assures us of this, promising, '*If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him*'.

All things in heaven and on earth

The final paragraph of several of the Prefaces in the Roman Missal says of Christ, '*Through him the angels of heaven offer their prayer of adoration as they rejoice in your presence for ever*'. So, at the end of every Eucharistic Prayer, we proclaim, '*Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is yours, almighty Father*'. In the Prologue of St John's Gospel we are familiar with the truth about God's Word, '*Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him*'. And in the Nicene Creed we declare our belief in God, the Maker of all things, visible and invisible. But not all of us reflect on the first chapter of St Paul's letter to the Colossians where we are told that all things in heaven and on earth were created through God's Son, the Word, and for him, so that '*he holds all things in unity*' and, later, '*God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross*'. Only in its passing through the pierced and offered heart of Jesus on the Cross, consecrated by his total loving of the Father's will, is the worship of all creation transmuted, in the glory of his rising to newness of life, into the fullness of prayer in the Spirit.

A new relationship

From what we have read in earlier chapters we understand that this peace, won for us in his redeeming action, goes far beyond the forgiveness of sins. In his own rising to the newness of life which is the fullness of the Spirit, he can offer to those who come to him in faith a sharing in that same newness of life in him which is our being raised to a new relationship with the Blessed Trinity as adopted sons and daughters of the Father. With this relationship we receive access to that level of communication which expresses, and is appropriate to, the relationship.

This communication, our prayer, which is personal as well as communal, is our response to God's Word bestowed on us as his people and as individuals. One of the greatest gifts coming to us in Christ's Incarnation is that we learn from him in his humanity the trust and intimacy of response that best expresses our relationship with our almighty Father, always in him and through him.

The prayers of the Church, more often than not, end with a shorter or longer version of, *'Through Christ our Lord'*. Our prayer would lose something of its radiance if familiarity were to lead us to miss the full beauty of what we are saying: not just our hope that the favour we ask for will come to us through Christ but our prayer itself, when modelled on his, is made in him and through him and so empowered by his Sonship. This is what enables Paul to write, *'The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words'* (Rom. 8.26).

Scope of our prayer

Most Christians know and happily accept the truth that it is through Christ our Redeemer that all God's blessings come to us, first as the Creating Word to whom we owe our very being, and then as the Saviour who, through his Paschal action, has won for us the gift of the Holy Spirit. But there are many who fail to appreciate that the power really to pray, as opposed to going through the motions of 'saying prayers' is a special gift of the Spirit. If prayer consisted only in asking for favours from God, and unfortunately there seem to those who do so limit their personal prayer, then simply directing it to Christ would be right and proper. We see in the gospels how Jesus responded to pleas for healing made with faith in him. But we see there, too, in his own prayer, as also in that of the Church, that we need to express our Christ-centred relationship with God in the hope, the pleading for pardon and salvation, the loving gratitude, the adoration and heartfelt longing of the psalms supported by the faith and trust which flow from our being united with him.

The Father loves you

After declaring himself to be *'the Way, the Truth and the Life'*, Jesus tells us, *'No one can come to the Father except through me'* (John 14.6), and later, *'anything you ask for from the Father he will grant in my name'* (John 16.23). Yet he says too, in words which perhaps look forward to the post-Resurrection time of instruction, *'When that day comes, you will ask in my name and I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you, because the Father himself loves you for loving me and believing that I came from God'* (John 16.26-27). He seems to be saying that, once we have received the Holy Spirit, we can address our heavenly Father directly because of the relationship of love which we have with him through our relationship with himself, who is ever the heart of our prayer. Thanks to the Word's becoming flesh, one of ourselves, our personal prayer can grow in intimacy, a sacrament of the invisible God and drawing us, through our uniting our prayer with his, into the eternal loving of the Trinity.

Relationship and Communication

In his Last Supper discourse, Jesus is promising, *'I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you. In a short time the world will no longer see me, because I live and you will live'*, that fullness of life which will follow his going to the Father and which is our new

relationship in him and through him. He continues, *'On that day you will understand that I am in the Father and I in you and you in me'*. He is speaking of that unity of real life which is the sharing of his life of the Spirit and from what we have seen earlier, this life is relationship, our sharing in the Sonship of Christ. We have to ask, then, how this relationship is to be expressed, understanding that, having been created in the image of God and redeemed into unity with Christ, we must find this in the mystery of the Trinity and in God's revealing himself in the Word made flesh. So we come to realise that in the humanity of Jesus in the Gospels and helped by the inspired writings of John and Paul, our way is made clear.

In an Apostolic Letter about social communication, Pope John Paul II once wrote that in making the gift of sending to us the Word made flesh, God 'gives to communication its deepest and most perfect meaning'. This is because there can be no more perfect communicating than that infinite, absolutely self-giving love between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, which is the life of God from all eternity; and in the total self-giving and Resurrection of Jesus, God offers a share in that communicating to each of us. In Christ, humanity is raised to intimate friendship with God, with the Persons of the Trinity, for which we were made and which, whether we know it or not, we long for.

Although referring to the vast increase of communication in our day on the purely human level, words of Pope Benedict, in his message for World Communications Day of 2009, point to the friendship element which has to be at the heart of our prayer. He writes, 'This desire for communication and friendship is rooted in our very nature as human beings and cannot be adequately understood as a response to technical innovations. In the light of the biblical message, it should be seen primarily as a reflection of our participation in the communicative and unifying Love of God, who desires to make of all humanity one family' ... and later, 'When we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming more fully human'. How much more when we open our hearts to the Lord.

So not only does God communicate freely with us, but in union with Christ, 'in Christ' as Paul would say, we are enabled to communicate freely with God. Eternally there is the infinite and absolute self-giving to one another of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the humility of the complete exchange of love between Father and Son which is itself the divine Person of the Holy Spirit. There we find that communicating fully does not consist in exchanging words and ideas but is the mutual gift of selves which is the truth of love and whose essence is the giving and receiving which we would describe in human terms as heart-to-heart, the life of God who is Love. This is the God whom Jesus has revealed to us, not a God of dominating power ruling in solitary splendour, but a Community of Persons so entirely bonded in the divine life of loving as to be Three, yet wholly One.

It is this life of total loving, total communicating, that God intended for us when he created us, and it is this that Christ won back for us when, on the first Easter Day, he could say, *'Receive the Holy Spirit'* (John 20.22). We have been caught up in the life of God so that his Word has become our word. To the extent that we surrender our hearts to the goodness and truth of his Spirit, we share in that most profound communicating which is the life of God, both in our prayer and deeper faith, and in our knowing and living the bond of our relationship in Christ's Eucharist with every one of God's sons and daughters. *'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him'*.

Universal Prayer

We hold, then, that through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, those who are baptized into the community of his new body, and nourished by his Eucharist, are brought into a special relationship with our Trinitarian God, a relationship signified by the water of the Spirit and the blood of the New Covenant flowing from the heart of Christ crucified and risen.

This, of course, is far from claiming that prayer is beyond the reach of the unbaptized. We have only to think of the prophets and psalmists of Israel, whose prayer was used by Jesus himself and is still inspiring his people, to understand this. Also, dealing with other non-Christian religions, the Fathers of Vatican II said of the Muslims, 'They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth'. And about others, 'Nor is God remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since he gives to all men life and breath and all things'. What counts is to 'seek God with a sincere hearts'. What the Church does teach, also in *Lumen Gentium* 16, is that 'Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life'. So the praying of all people, before or after Christ's saving death into new life, whether they have had knowledge of him or not, is led by the Holy Spirit won for all mankind by our one Mediator, the Word who, *'the true light which enlightens all men ... was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him'* (John 1.9-10). But to those who accepted him *'he gave power to become children of God'* (John 1.12). Paul makes this explicit: *'Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. The spirit you received is not the spirit of slaves bringing fear into your lives again; it is the spirit of sons, and it makes us cry out, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God'* (Rom. 8.14-16).