

# SPIRITUAL WRITINGS

Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ

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## THERESE IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH

### *Introduction:*

#### a. The title is taken from 2 sources:

1. The famous passage from Therese' autobiography which is quoted in the Breviary, where Therese states that she wants **to be love**, deep into the heart of Mother Church:

“If the Church was a body composed of different members, it couldn't lack the noblest of all: it must have a heart, and a heart burning with love. And I realized that this love was the true motive force which enabled the other members of the Church to act, if it ceased to function the apostles would forget to preach the Gospel, the martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. Love in fact is the vocation which includes all others; it's a universe of its own, comprising all time and space – it is eternal. Beside myself with joy, I cried out: “Jesus, my love! I have found my vocation, and my vocation is love’. I have discovered where it is that I belong in the Church, the niche that God has appointed for me. To be nothing else than love, deep down in the heart of Mother Church; that's to be everything at once – my dream wasn't a dream after all”.

2. The editorial of *WORLD MISSION* (October '99): The editor compares the mission scene in the contemporary church to a choir of different voices (or a symphony) or a symphony of colors, and puts the mission and the missionary at the heart of the Church:

“What is mission's song about? Well, I experience it as a song of gratitude, for I'm grateful that God's grace was put this song on my lips, allowing me (why me? I don't know!) to live at the Church's heart, because that is what mission is: the Church's heart, the Church's very nature”.

b. St. Therese of the Child Jesus was proclaimed the Co-Patron of Missions (together with St. Francis Xavier) in 1927 by Pius XI. She was proclaimed Doctor of the Church in 1997 by John Paul II. Her relics are due to arrive in the Philippines next year 2000, on January 30 and remain until April.

The relevance of Therese as patron of the Missions can be considered according to a more **traditional** way and according to a more **profound** way, as we are going to see.

The fact that Therese was an enclosed, contemplative nun does not constitute a disadvantage, but it is central also to a genuine missionary spirituality as we gather from *Redemptoris Missio*, 91:

“The missionary must be a ‘contemplative in action’. He finds answers to problems in the light of God's work and in personal and community prayer. My contact with the

representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of Mission depends to a great extent, on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way. He is a witness to the experience of God, and must be able to say with the Apostles: 'That which we have looked upon ... concerning the word of life ... we proclaim also to you' (1John 1:1-3)".

In this sense, Therese is not at the periphery or outskirts but in the heart of Mission, of the Mission of the future.

## *1. THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE LINK BETWEEN THERESE AND THE MISSIONS:*

### **1. Therese desired to be a missionary, as we read in her diary:**

"I would like to travel the world, to preach your name and plant the glorious cross on unbelieving soil but, o Beloved, one mission alone would not suffice. For I would like to announce the Gospel at one and the same time in the four corners of the earth as far as the furthest flung islands. I would like to be a missionary, but not just for a few years. I would have liked to have been a missionary from the time of the world's creation and to continue until the centuries exhaust themselves. But most of all I would like to shed my blood for You down to the last drop ... My Jesus, what will your answer be to all my follies? Can there ever be a more insignificant, more incapable soul than I? And yet, for the very reason that I am weak, it pleases you, Lord, to fulfill by small, childish wishes. May you now fulfill other, more greater desires ...".

The passage is interesting because it shows the importance of desires and dreams: they are the stuff which ideals are made of ... If I remember my missionary vocation and the missionary vocation of some of the best candidates I met in my task as Vocation Promoter, I can see the importance of desires and dreams... I remember the passion there was in the thought of being missionaries, of going to Africa or Latin America, etc. ... So, it is a lesson to dare and to dream, to be ambitious for the highest gifts...

Therese came near to being a missionary to Hanoi, Vietnam, when she volunteered to go there for the foundation of a new Carmel... But even as she offered her services, the first symptoms of tuberculosis, the disease that would soon kill her, appeared:

"One needs a special vocation to live in foreign Carmelite convents. Many sisters think they are called when they are not. You have told me, Mother (the Abbess), that I have this vocation and that only my health is stopping me. I have no doubt that this obstacle would vanish if the Lord were to send me far away, so I live in serenity".

2. Therese had brother missionaries with whom she was in correspondence and for whom she offered her prayers and sacrifices. They are two: Maurice Bartholomew Belliere, a student of the Missionaries of Africa, and a missionary of China, Fr. Eugene Roulland.

There is a recent book *:Therese and Maurice: the story of a love*, by Bishop Patrick Ahern, auxiliary Bishop of New York, in which the correspondence between Maurice and Therese is published... Fr. Belliere left for Africa, Algiers, on 29 September 197, just when Therese was dying (she died the following day, September 30).

He was a difficult candidate, with many problems and Therese kept writing to him even when she had stopped writing to all the rest; when she was so weak that she could manage to handle only a little pencil... Maurice did not last long in the missions... He caught sleeping sickness, had to come back to France and died at 22 (1907).

I met Bishop Ahern when I went to preach a Mission Appeal to Staten Island in 1982 and we became friends. He told me that his long love for St. Therese had originated when he was a young priest and was helped almost miraculously by a special grace of St. Therese, when he was on the brink of nervous exhaustion.

It is a common experience for missionaries to have spiritual sisters among the Contemplative nuns and also others... It is a beautiful experience which enriches the life of the missionary and is a source of great support and spiritual progress... I had and have this experience in my missionary life and there is a similarity with a detail of St. Therese life which I want to highlight.

Therese offered all her sufferings for her brother missionaries. One of the convent sisters came upon her one day as she was trying, with difficulty, to walk in the cloister, her life now threatened by TB. The sister told her to go and rest, to which came the reply: 'I am walking for a missionary'.

When I was in Lucca as a young priest, I befriended a sister of the daughters of St. Zita, Mariangela Valentini. She was a teacher of Biology and Chemistry in the Liceo and involved with the Diocesan Missionary Office. Clever and full of enthusiasm, she wanted to go as a missionary to Rwanda, where her order was opening some communities, but unfortunately, Sr. Mariangela had lost a leg in a car accident and was wearing an artificial limb... For many years when I was in Uganda she wrote to me and sometimes, when the prosthesis was giving her pain especially in climbing steps, she wrote that she was saying to Jesus quietly: This is for my brother, Padre Renzo. May God give her the reward: she died in 1994.

3. Therese offered her prayers and sacrifices for the missionaries and for the success of their work. This is the main reason of her being proclaimed the Patron of Missions. This is what we read in the

encyclical letter *Rerum Ecclesiae* by Pius XI:

“And truly the preachers of the Gospel could well tire themselves out, toil and lay down their lives to lead pagans to the Catholic religion; they may be ever so industrious, ever so diligent and use every mean known to man; but none of this could be of any avail, everything would be in vain, if God, with His grace, were not to touch the hearts of unbelievers to make them docile and draw them to him”.

The Pope’s intention was to highlight that **mission is the work of God** and he stressed that it was of vital importance that missionary work be born of and accompanied by prayer and sacrifices.

Desire to go to the missions, having brothers missionaries to write to and pray for and more generally offering prayers and sacrifices in order to substantiate the work of the missionaries: all this reflect a traditional position which is still valid nowadays but which somehow leaves Therese at the periphery or in the background... The central stage is held by the missionary in the field, according to the old saying: “*To cross the sea, to save a soul and to die*”...

Of course, it is the missionary in the field who finds his position very much changed by the so called paradigm shift that has taken place in the last decades since Vatican II, as we can see from this quotation which speaks of *CROSS-CULTURAL MISSION*:

“In the context of each local church being responsible for its own mission and co responsible for the mission to all the churches, internationality will take the form of mutuality in mission. This gives us a new perspective on mission *ad extra*. I think that we should speak today of cross-cultural mission. In practice this will be the responsibility of some people who hear a special call for it. One could rapidly list a number of conditions which seem essential for their success. They should not only be sent, but also asked for and accepted. They would probably go for specific jobs that require specific skills. They have to acculturate themselves – that is learn the language, adapt oneself to the way of life, and adjust to the climate – in order to be effective.

They have a special role of mediation between the local churches. To the local church that receives them, they bring the riches of the cultural expression of the Gospel of their own local church. In turn they carry back to the church that sends them, the riches they have experienced in the church where they are working. If we understand this subtle interplay of the local and the foreign, one can wonder whether a completely foreign missionary community can be really meaningful today, except in special circumstances, where it could meet particular needs for a particular time.

Missionaries would go not only from the North to the South, but also from the South to the North (*Michael Amalados, S.J., Making all things new, 1990, pag. 186*).

## *Conclusion*

Already Therese classic passage which we quoted in the beginning (where she declares that no one charism and function in the body of the Church can work without love and that therefore she wants to be love deep down in the heart of the Church), goes beyond the traditional link and places Therese on the threshold of the mission of the XXI century or the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium...

This Mission is in the heart of the Church and it is the heart of the Church. There is where the new frontline of Mission is marked. How does Therese stay as LOVE, in the heart of Mother Church and of Mission? This is the object of the next article.

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## THERESE IN THE HEART OF MISSION

### *Introduction*

1. In 1997, St. Therese of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face was declared Doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II. Doctor in the science of Divine Love (*Scientia Divini Amoris*). This fact is certainly meaningful for the times we are living in, it certainly points out to a special significance.

The impact of *The history of a soul* and of Therese's personality and holiness in the people of the XXth Century has been extraordinary. She has been influential in the understanding of the Christian Mystery by many modern Theologians like Journet, Congar, Von Balthasar... and writers like Bernanos, Mauriac, Julien Green, Thomas Merton...; but especially she has directly inspired other more recent saints who have shared with her the position on the frontier of the Absolute: other Carmelite saints like Elizabeth of the Trinity and Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) and Blessed Gabriella Sagheddu, a Trappistine from Vitorchiano, who offered her life for the Unity of the Christians and died at 25 in 1939 as well as possibly many other heroic but less known souls...

Many trends of our understanding of God and our reflection on God and Christ which have found confluence in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, are present in the writings but especially in the sensitivity, outlook and spirituality... in the spiritual adventure of Therese.

She did not bring any fresh ideas to the Christian teaching about Grace (the gratuitous love of God), but "Therese's lesson is the luminous expression of her personal experience of grace" (John Paul II). Not a particular teaching on Grace, but a "chronicle of Grace" (Charles Peguy).

The experience of Grace, whereby Jesus is visibly at work in her, makes her exemplary:

"The secret of Therese's holiness is that it comes totally from God. Holiness in her is not a mountain that one climbs by rigid ascetic routes, almost if we were to make ourselves worthy of divine Grace step after step by our own efforts. Rather it is being born aloft like children: and the force bearing us upwards is the arms of Jesus himself, as he puts it in her diary" (Danneels).

2. According to Jean Guitton (in his book: *Le genie de Therese de Lisieux*, last ed. 1995), Therese's genius is to make simple the synthesis of the Christian Faith with the doctrine of the "Spiritual Childhood" and to make it attractive and fascinating because of her sense of spontaneity and youthfulness.

The following main points show us how in line with our modern sensitivity Therese's spirituality is:

- Grace saves over and above works. "Everything is grace" is the famous sentence of Bernanos' *Cure de campagne*... The renewed perception of the universal salvific will of God is possibly the most striking element of modern missiology and mission.
- Love for the world, the simple life, the everyday people ... Love for the truth, a disenchanted look at reality, a spirituality immanent in the world, the modern world, experiencing even the radical doubt, the taste for nothingness (*"I'm sitting at the table of sinners"*)...
- The "just for today" attitude: the sacrament of the present moment... Eternity is now... Expectation is already possession... Life of grace is an anticipation of Paradise. And inversely, heaven will consist for Therese in continuing doing good on earth.

The **little way** is a synthesis of those three main principles:

"We have but these brief instants of life to love Jesus..."

"I cannot see what more could I have after death... I will see the good God, that's it. For as far as being with Him is concerned, I'm totally so already, even here on earth".

"You know, my God, that to love you on earth I only have today... What matters, Lord, if the future is unknown... No, I cannot pray to You for tomorrow... Keep my heart pure, cover me with your shadow and let it be but for today".

"Even now, Jesus sees us in glory and takes joy for our eternal blessedness".

"I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth".

"I can but to nourish on truth, which is why I never wanted to have visions... I prefer to wait until after my death".

*I. Therese is in the heart of Mission because she has an experiential message for the three points which lie in the frontline of Mission at the threshold of the XXI Century:*

The prophetic witness to the existence of God and the spirituality of man: that man's destiny is open to transcendence and is inserted into the plan of God for the world.

Although there may be many aspects in the paradigm shift concerning Mission, certainly priority must be given to the resistance against the wave of practical atheism which seems to be the consequence of the consumer society.

It is actually the first time in history that we witness widespread godlessness and this is especially present in the countries of ancient Christianity. Michael

Amalados, in the book quoted above, sees in the secularized countries of the West the frontline of mission:

“If we look at mission in a global perspective we see needs and problems everywhere... But if we consider the various challenges of mission today and seek to prioritize them, I think that the most urgent problem is the moral one of consumerism and its consequent exploitative and oppressive structures. Commerce becomes supreme and everything else – religion, culture, politics and social relationships – becomes subservient to it.

There is the loss of the sense of transcendence. People have no time for religion. They become slaves to machines. The discoveries of science and the powers of technology are abused for selfish ends. The poor become poorer. The facility of modern communications makes control and exploitation easier and faster. The concern for the common good and the attention to moral and spiritual values break down. A rising individualism and competition undermine human relationships and community. Violence in all its forms increases. Whole peoples are at the mercy of market forces unconcerned with the plight of the marginalized...

Though the need for the Gospel is everywhere, I think that it is particularly acute in the First World... From the spiritual point of view, the First world seems to be the place that needs a prophetic voice most urgently...” (pp. 186-188).

Consumerism, commercialism and secularism constitute a kind of contagious disease which is spreading widely, like a new gospel, and has affected especially the countries of ancient Christianity and has caused the great apostasy, the desertion from the practice of faith, the fragmentation of the family, the public acceptance of abortion, the disaffection for generativity, the rising of pornography, etc...

The epidemic has caused a domino effect: France, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Poland... have in turn succumbed to this process which is passing slowly to the Second and Third World the more globalization is drawing every country into the logic of unbridled capitalism and its consequences.

This practical godlessness is often accompanied by virulent, militant atheism like that of Richard Dawkins, a scientist of Oxford University and popularizer of godlessness (He is said to have the largest website and to keep a permanent challenge to the believers: he is ready to pay 1 million pounds (or dollars) to the person who can bring a real proof of any supernatural phenomenon!)...

People have lost the sense of God and have developed the sense of nothingness, the fascination for nothingness...

Therese has offered her life for the souls of the atheists and suffered a long crisis of faith as a consequence of her request to Jesus *to sit at the table of sinners*.

There is such a clarity and forcefulness in her exposition of her crises of faith, that she fears to border blasphemy:

“I wish I could explain what I feel but it is beyond my power. One must have passed through the tunnel to understand how black is the darkness. Let me try, however, to illustrate what I mean. I will suppose that I was born in a land of thick fog, that I had never see nature in her smiling moods or one single ray of sunshine. From my childhood, I had heard of these things and knew that the country in which I dwelt was not my real home, that there was another land to which I must always aspire. This was not fable invented by an inhabitant of the land of fogs. It was an unquestionable truth, for the King of that sunlit country had come to dwell for three and thirty years in the land of darkness though, alas!’ *the darkness did not comprehend that He was the light of the world*’.

But dear Jesus, thy child believes firmly that Thou art the Light Divine, she asks pardon for her unbelieving brethren and is willing to eat the bread of sorrow as long as Thou wilt it so. For love of Thee she will sit at the table of bitterness where these poor sinners take their food and will not rise from it till Thou givest the sign. But may she say in her own name and in the name of her guilty brethren: ‘*O God be merciful to us sinners*’. Send us away justified. May all those in whom faith does not shine at last see the light! My God, if that table which they profane must be purified by one who loves Thee, I am willing to remain there alone to eat the bread of tears until the day when it shall please Thee to bring me to Thy kingdom of light. I ask no favor beyond that of never offending Thee...

The fog that surrounds me finds its way into my very soul, and so blinds me that I can no longer see the lovely picture of my promised home... it has all faded away. When my heart, weary of the enveloping darkness, tries to find some rest and strength in the thought of an everlasting life to come, my anguish only increases. It seems to me that the darkness itself, borrowing the voice of the unbeliever, cries mockingly’: you dream of a land of light and fragrance, you believe that the Creator of these wonders will be yours for ever, you think to escape one day from the mists in which you now languish? Hope on! Hope on! Look forward to death! It will give you, not what you hope for, but a night darker still, the night of utter nothingness!’

This description of what I suffer, dear Mother, is as far removed from reality and the painter’s rough outline from the model he copies, but to write more might be to blaspheme... Even now I may have said too much. May God forgive me! He knows how I try to live by faith, even though it affords me no consolation. I have made more acts of faith during the past year than in all the rest of my life” (quoted by Dorothy Day, *THERESE, a life of Therese of Lisieux*, 1995, pp. 159-160).

These quotations give us the feeling of the realism and modernity of Therese’s sensitivity and her heroic inner stance for God in the darkness of temptation to godlessness and a secularized view of reality.

It must be a deep experience of the transcendence, the reality of a loving God, sought in the silence and solitude of prayer and filling the person with a deep respect for life and a sense of purpose and meaning for the human existence and the values which make it worth living what constitutes the advanced line of Mission in the coming future.

Therese is master and protagonist of this adventure of transcendence; certainly a source of inspiration for the immediate future.

*II. The second frontline of Mission in the XXIst Century will be the person of Jesus, the faith in the Divinity of Jesus.* The direction of pluralism and dialogue which the Catholic Church has adopted since Vatican II, with the recognition of the positive value of the non Christian Religions in the final salvation of people necessarily makes problematic the understanding of Jesus and his uniqueness as the Son of God and the only Savior of the World.

This is why Christology is such a hot field of theology at present and can be compared to a building sight... Already some theologians representing the post-modern tendency of the so called “pensiero debole” (literally: weak thought, meaning a thought which does not believe in the possibility of absolute truths) have explained away the uniqueness and the divinity of Jesus...

Great opposers of the divinity of Jesus are traditionally the Moslems who believe that the divinity of Jesus, the Son of God, threatens the uniqueness of God and so they are opposed to the divinity of Jesus as well as to this salvific death on the Cross.

It is interesting to notice the words that are put in the decorations of the Temple of the Rock in Jerusalem: *The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, is only an Apostle of God and his Word which He conveyed into Mary and a Spirit proceeding from Him. Believe therefore in God and his Apostles and say not Three. It will be better for you. God is only one God. Far be it from His glory that He should have a Son”.*

The presence of Moslems in Europe is becoming more and more relevant and consequently the promotion of an image of Jesus Christ which does not include his divinity. This is the title of a full page article in the OBSERVER (London, 30 August 1998): *There is only one God and his name is Allah. And Abraham, Jesus and Muhammad are his prophets. This should be a marriage of ideas made in heaven.* The author, Malise Ruthwen, does not even take into account the consequences for Christianity of what he considers a marriage made in heaven...

Moreover, Moslems do not believe in the death of Jesus of the Cross. They believe, according to the pseudo-gospel of Barnabas, that Jesus was spirited away by God and another man died on the cross in his place. They never seem to take the New Testament witness about Jesus seriously... Those who take it may convert and this Moslems cannot accept... They seem to have a hidden fear of the real Jesus. This is why they do not allow physically any Moslem to convert to

Christianity, but they are ready to kill... They act as if they have an almost invincible inferiority complex as regard Jesus...

Therese did not develop a personal, theoretical original Christology, but lived the living presence of Jesus in her life, experiencing the truth of so many gospel statements about Jesus which would not make any sense unless Christ is Son of God and God. This has been the faith of the Church since the beginning:

“Therese and her ‘small way’ are a potent antidote to this. She reminds us that **the heart of the Church is the love of Jesus**, and therefore love for Jesus Christ. And one cannot love an idea or a past. One can only love **a living person who is present**. The Church exists. It only withstands and journeys in history because of what this person has done and still does. For this reason, the sole mission is that performed by the person who, perhaps without speaking, points us with a childlike look in the direction of the real workings of the Lord in the here and now. It is a way of influencing the surroundings, almost, by irradiation, like a stove which says nothing and does nothing, immobile. It simply stands there and gives out heat, and everybody moves closer to enjoy the warmth.

This is how the Christian faith has always spread in the world and all the more so now. Today’s frail, hypersensitive people, resigned, sometimes desperate, can only be overwhelmed by encountering people whose eyes reflect the same presence which caressed the countenance of “Therese of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face” (Card. Danneels).

### *III. The third frontline of Mission in the XXIst Century is **the Cross**:*

*Jesus on the Cross is what St. Paul considers the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

In our modern world **the perception of the Cross is changing** under the influence of the prevailing materialism and secularism. Many times the Cross is profaned by the use that the entertainment world makes of it (e.g. huge crosses hanging from the neck of homosexuals, etc...); sometimes the profanation is more overt in work in works of art of anti-Christian character.

Recently, in Austria, a couple took the State to court over the issue of the crucifix in the classroom: they argued that the vision of the crucifix was psychologically damaging for their young daughter... They lost, but the case had a great resonance in the media.

Even in some sectors of Theology, the critique against the Cross which is accused to be a kind of medieval obsession gives fuel to the anti-Cross polemics, under the pretext of an accentuation of the glorious aspect of the Resurrection... There seems to be a kind of irritability and intolerance about the importance given to the Cross in traditional Christianity, as if it was not “*necessary for Christ to suffer and in this way enter into his glory* (Luke, 24:26); as if Jesus had died by accident.

The rejection of the most sacred of the Christian signs is striking in the following passage from an article by Polly Toynbee by the title: *Cradle of fanaticism*:

“Shrines that mark The Very Spot abound in Jerusalem and pretty unpleasant spot many of them are. Standing on Golgota is a good place to contemplate the perversity of a religion that has sanctified a particularly disgusting Roman torture. It is as if Jews had decided to wear miniature gas chamber replicas around their necks, turning the horror of the holocaust into a revered symbol of holiness”.

This statement is unfair in any sense: the Christian tradition has honored the Cross not because it is an instrument of torture, but because of the love of the Crucified. The Cross has always been understood as a glorification of those who die for an ideal, even a part from any religious faith. Toynbee is unfair to them as well in her distorted criticism of the Cross.

Daniel Comboni wrote the last words before dying in the letter dated 4/10/1881: “A am happy in the Cross, which, when borne willingly out of love for God, give birth to victory and eternal life”. The perspective is that of the resurrection (triumph and eternal life) but the attention is on the Cross on which the person lies in suffering...

This corresponds to the understanding of the scandal of the Cross by the early Church, by the unbroken Christian Tradition and by the experience of the Saints. “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

The cross is **not accidental** to the Christian faith and Mission. The Cross of Jesus is the paramount Christian symbol, because it reminds Christians of the centrality of the Pascal mystery in their faith life. “If Jesus Christ on the Cross stands at the center of Christian Theology, the Christian Church, the body of Christ, must be called the Church of the Cross” (Koyoma),

Not only Christians share in the Paschal Mystery of Christ as it is stated in *Gaudium et Spes* (and repeated verbatim in *Redemptoris Missio*): “We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers to everyone the possibility of sharing in the Pascal Mystery in a manner known to God”. Fr. James Kroeger, MM, in his book *Living Mission*, has made of this principle the pivotal idea of a new paradigm for Mission:

“Missionaries today struggle to be people of integrity, both in their own persons and in the approaches they employ in seeking the ‘conversion’ of the people they encounter. Missionaries do call people to faith, while respecting their freedom of conscience, their experience, their religions and cultures. Keeping these coordinates in fruitful tension is enhanced by reflection on **the paschal nature of all human experience** and linking it with the

Pascal Mystery as lived and revealed by Jesus. ‘Pascal Mission’ can serve as fundamental paradigm for all mission today”.

“Consider: all human life has a paschal configuration. Christian Faith is at heart a paschal faith. Missionaries seek to address the passion of Humanity. We need a ‘crucified mind’, not a ‘crusading mind’. The Church must be a caring community of Kroeger, *Naming the conversion we seek*).

Therese is at the heart of Mission for the way she has re-lived the Pascal Mystery in her life. She died consumed by the disease which she accepted for the sake of God and her brethren: she said expressly that she was offering her life for the conversion of sinners and for the spreading of the Church. When she was still a young girl at home, she had struggled with God for the soul of a convict condemned to Death, and she did not give in until she had proof of this last moment conversion (Cf. a similar, but more dramatic episode in the life of St. Catherine of Siena). “This is a statement you can rely on: Christ came to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15; cfr. 2 Tim. 2:8-13; Titus, 2:11).

## ***Conclusion***

1. St. Therese of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face is **at the heart of Mission**, the frontline of our proclamation well into the XXI Century:

- **That there is a God of love;**
- **That He has saved the world through Jesus Christ;**
- **That in Jesus He is with us in our human struggle facing suffering and death.**

St. Therese teaches us to be courageous and advance into the heart of Mission: we shall be the more missionaries and happy ones-

- if we invest everything in our contemplative experience of God as love;
- if we love the Lord Jesus intensely and allow Him to take us to
- Calvary, together with the people we serve, with the certain Hope of victory, life and resurrection.

2. There is a clear note in the perspective of Mission which seems to Affect this transition period from the second to the third millennium of Christianity and it is like the synthesis of the traits that we saw in Therese: **defenselessness**



**and vulnerability.** The position of the missionaries and of Christianity as a whole has become vulnerable.

Many missionaries succumb often to the situations of violence present among the people they serve (it is said that the last decades have seen an average of one missionary killed every week) and the Christian religion finds itself exposed to the attacks of fundamentalisms of every kind. The moment the Church has lowered its defenses as a consequence of the spirit of the Council and in pursuit of dialogue and respect for different traditions, it finds itself at the mercy of the historical movements...

This defenselessness and vulnerability appear as weakness, but it is probably strength because it calls for a true evangelical style of proclamation and it relies totally in the power of the Spirit and in the Providence of the Lord of history.

I see the same attitude in the spirituality of Therese, especially as we refer to her title of the Holy Face:

My devotion to the Holy Face, or rather *all my spirituality*, has been based on the words of Isaiah: ‘There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness; and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness in him. Despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity; and his look was, as it were, hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not. (Like a lamb, he was taken to the slaughterhouse, without opening his mouth)’. I too desire to be without glory or beauty, to tread the winepress alone, unknown to any creature”. (D.Day, ID., p. 166).

3. As we can see, the lesson of Therese is first of all on the line of being, more than on the line of doing. And of being Christ-like. We can conclude with the words of John Paul II:

“The missionary is a person of the Beatitudes. Before sending out the Twelve to evangelize, Jesus, in his ‘missionary discourse’ (cfr. Mt. 10), teaches them *the paths of mission: poverty, meekness, acceptance of suffering and persecution, the desire for justice and peace, charity* – in other words, the Beatitudes, lived out in the apostolic life (cf. Mt. 5:1-12).

By living the Beatitudes, the missionary experiences and shows concretely that the kingdom of God has already come, and that he has accepted it. The characteristic of every authentic missionary life is *the inner joy* that comes from faith. In a world tormented and oppressed by so many problems, a world tempted to pessimism, the one who proclaims the ‘Good News’ must be *a person who has found true hope in Christ*” (*Redemptoris Missio*, n.91).

[illegible]

*Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ  
October 1999.*

# THE BETTER PART

*The missionary of the third millennium must be a contemplative. This is especially true in the Asian context, because of the eastern tradition of Yoga and Zen. Yet, Christian contemplation is essentially different because it is always a personal encounter with the personal God of the Bible and Jesus is the way to God in the Holy Spirit. It is in contemplation that prayer becomes love.*

*“But the Lord answered: “Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her” (Luke 10:41-42).*

Certainly Jesus did not despise Martha’s service since service is love in action and Jesus had stated that the “Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve”. Yet, when we finish serving, what do we do? We continue loving. Love never ends. Prayer is love, especially contemplation: it is the better part that Mary chose when, looking and listening, she fixed the attention of her heart in Jesus.

## *Contemplation is experience*

"The true missionary of this Third Millennium is the Saint" writes Saint John Paul II in his letter *Redemptoris Missio* (90, 91). The pope continues: “The missionary must be a 'contemplative in action'. He finds answer to problems in the light of God's word and in personal and community prayer. My contact with the representatives of the non-Christian spiritual tradition, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way. He is a witness to the experience of God, and must be able to say with the Apostles: "that which we have looked upon ... concerning the word of life ... we proclaim also to you (*1 John* 1: 1-3)".

Contemplation is experience. It is therefore something truly personal. Study can help, advice, example can foster contemplation, but only experience can make contemplatives of us. The commitment to experience contemplation is a long life commitment and, at the same time, a gift. We must struggle to become contemplative as if it depended only on us, we must expect it in faith because we know that eventually it is a gift from God.

The mystery of God can be compared to a limitless horizon. The more we go up the more the horizon expands and the more we try to approach its borders the more they go far from us. The same is of the mystery of God: the more we enter into its knowledge the more we experience that it is inexhaustible. Only the pure of heart can see God: the simple, those with a limpid heart. If God is in front of us as a limitless horizon, our life appears as a continuous journey towards God.

Even purity of heart, as any other Christian virtue, is never a totally reached perfection; if you think you have got it, you lose the purity of heart and you can no longer see God. You will deceive yourself like the man in the Song of Songs who wanted to purchase love: "Were a man to offer all the wealth of his house to buy love, contempt is all he would purchase" (*Song of Songs* 8: 7).

### ***Christian Prayer Facing East***

The call to contemplation assumes a special quality in the Asian context because of the presence of Hinduism and Buddhism. Fr. William Johnston, S.J. spent most of his life in Japan and, as a scholar of spirituality, was enthusiastic about learning from the tradition of the great eastern religions. The dialogue with Zen Buddhism became his life-long commitment.

He writes: "Christians might not only avail of the riches of oriental meditation but they should become leaders in a movement of which Christ would be the center – a meditation movement which would humbly learn from Zen. I have told Japanese Christians- and I believe it is true- that they have an important role to play in the development of Christianity. Their vocation is to renew meditation within the Church (because of their Zen tradition) and interpret it to the West".

The best example of the truth of this vision is the life experience of a Japanese Dominican priest, Fr. Shigeto Oshida who died in November 2003 at Takamori. He was a follower of Buddhism and a Zen practitioner when he met Christ in the witness of a German friend, during the war. Fr. Oshida was used to share his spiritual journey: how following the noble silence of Zen he had easily believed in the Man who died on the cross proclaiming universal forgiveness. "Forgiveness is silence within silence" explains

Fr. Oshida, "To keep silence is to enter the womb of God. Christ is in the heart of Zen".

Fr. Oshida's death has been the best illustration of the Christian potentialities of Zen mysticism. In the convent of Takamori, in the last days of his life, he spent long time contemplating the way autumn dresses the surrounding hills in colors. Looking at the leaves falling gently on the ground, he uttered the words that will remain on his lips until the last breath: "God is marvelous! Amen, Amen!" His face in death was radiant with beauty and peace.

### ***Paths to Contemplation***

The following quotations give us a feeling of the call to contemplation as the most profound human and Christian experience: "There is nothing more powerful on earth than purity and prayer" (*Teilhard De Chardin*). "Human beings have a noble task: that of prayer and love. To pray and to love: that is their happiness on earth" (*The Curate of Ars*). "We are put on earth for a little while, that we may learn to bear the beams of love" (*William Blake*). "Every person is alone in the heart of the earth, pierced by a ray of the sun, and it is soon evening" (*Salvatore Quasimodo*).

To be a contemplative is a vocation for all of us who struggle for human and spiritual maturity. Contemplation is a gift and a conquest. Contemplation is something to be desired and experienced through different paths that bring us to intimacy with God, the Father, through Jesus, in the Holy Spirit.

### **Contemplation and self-acceptance**

The center of the whole Christian message is the commandment of love: we were born to love. This is the sense of our life: to answer the love God has towards us. What can however happen when we don't love ourselves? Psychology has its specific contribution: it is possible to have a relationship of respect and reciprocity with other people only when we accept ourselves, respect ourselves, and basically love ourselves.

Not only, but the absence of self-acceptance and self-esteem, especially when unconscious, can represent an obstacle to recognize and accept God's love for each one of us. Self-acceptance is a necessary condition for the journey to contemplation. Let our prayer be: "Lord, take me as I am and make me as you want me to be".

### **Contemplation as "Finding God in all things"**

This is the Ignatian way of becoming contemplatives. At the end of his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius invites us to the contemplation to gain divine love, which is a call to grow in contemplating God present in all things. It is a vision of God's immanent and

loving presence in all realities so that we may always live “planted in love and built on love”(Ephesians 3:18).

Let us recognize the degrees of God presence in everything that surrounds us and respond to them in love. *First degree*: God wishes to be present to us in his gifts. Therefore, let us not take anything for granted. Let our response be gratitude and thanksgiving. *Second degree*: God wishes to be present to us in the beauty and goodness of each gift. Let our response be reverence and sobriety. *Third degree*: God is at work in the heart of the world: “My Father goes on working and so do I”, says Jesus (John 5:17). Response: let us give our loyal service to the building of God’s kingdom. Praise, reverence and service to God: this is where love becomes contemplation.

### Contemplation and Consecration

Our baptismal and religious consecration makes us God’s exclusive possession: “Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm” (*Song of Songs* 8:6). Consecration will become contemplation when our love becomes tenderness: sensitivity, youthfulness, vulnerability, affection, benevolence, care, compassion, devotion... These are not simply a human qualities but spiritual qualities: gifts of the Spirit, born of faith.

Tenderness is also fruit of compassion; virginity of the heart is also silence, loneliness and standing alone in faith. This happens when we become aware that what we have given up in our consecration will never be there: the unending poverty; the long loneliness; when we break down, we fall, we experience rebellion, fragility, the weight of evil, sin; when we experience the silence of God and the apparent inutility of our efforts. To stand in front of God in naked faith is contemplation.

### The Bridegroom’s bosom

“The Bridegroom’s chest gives joy to her spouse”, Saint Bernard tells us. The Devotions to the Sacred Heart, to the Divine Mercy focuses the attention of our heart in the Blessed Humanity of Jesus as the sacrament of our salvation. This aspect was manifested throughout the centuries in innumerable forms in the arts. The Bridegroom’s chest signifies love and tenderness. It is the feminine, maternal side of God revealed in Jesus. To take shelter in the open Heart of Jesus is contemplation.

### Contemplation and friendship

Jesus said: “*I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father*” (John 15:15). To experience Jesus’ friendship is contemplation. To see Jesus in the face of our friends is contemplation. To experience joy in wholesome friendship is contemplation. Really the affectionate pursuit of contemplative prayer is a

bounty and a refuge for every sensitive and mature follower of Jesus, the better part that will not be taken from us. (Fr. L. C., MCCJ - September 2014)

[illegible]

## Reflection

## FUTURE HORIZONS: 10 Pastoral Guidelines

*“Put out into the deep and lower your net for a catch”: this sentence of Jesus to Simon Peter in the Gospel of Luke (5:4) was taken allegorically by Blessed John Paul II to describe the missionary attitude that befits the Church at the beginning of the Third Millennium. The need of a new evangelization to overcome the passivity of traditional Catholicism and address the growing masses of non-Christians has been repeated in countless ways by Pope Benedict XVI and many others. Recently Pope Francis has given most remarkable guidelines in his document “The Joy of the Gospel”.*

“Now it happened that Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing around him...Jesus got into one of the boats –it was Simon’s – and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowd from the boat. When he had finished speaking, Jesus said to Simon: “Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch” (See *Luke* 5:1-11). The episode was easily and happily interpreted allegorically by Blessed John Paul II in his letter which ushers in the Third Millennium of Christianity, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001).

“At the beginning of the new millennium, and at the closing of the Great Jubilee, a new stage of the Church’s journey begins and our hearts ring out with the words of Jesus when one day, after speaking to the crowds from Simon’s boat, he invited the Apostles to “put out into the deep for a catch: “*Duc in altum!*”. Peter and his companions trusted Christ’s words, and cast the nets. “When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish” (Luke 5:6).

*“Duc in altum!* These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm, and to look forward to the future with confidence: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ...At the beginning of this new century, our steps must quicken as we travel the highways of the world...

### ***Unfurl the sails to the wind of the Spirit***

“Together let us unfurl the Church’s sails to the wind of the Spirit, examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the sign of the Gospel, to answer “the ever recurring questions which men and women about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come”. From the beginning of his pontificate in 1978, Pope John Paul II understood that his commission from the Lord was to lead the Church into the new millennium.

It is said that the Polish primate, Cardinal Wyszyński, had told the pope immediately after his election that this was his task. John Paul II mentions this in his first encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) which was his program. The pope indicates over and over again that our faith is about a person – Jesus Christ- who introduces us into the fellowship and communion of the Holy Trinity.

The pope recognizes that it is naïve to think that there is some magic formula to solve the problems of our age. No, he says, we shall not be saved by a formula, but by a Person, Jesus, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you. This essential guideline remains vital against the background of traditional Catholicism that in the Philippines is exemplified by the *Simbang Gabi* (The Novena for Christmas). The *Simbang Gabi* with all its charm, is certainly a feature of the Filipino Catholicism.

Such an extraordinary attendance! We cannot exclude an element of “superstition”, or better the belief that if you do certain acts, you capture the good luck. It is like a spiritual *feng shui*, something the most devote and practicing Chinese Christians will not neglect! The early hours are beautiful, the weather cool, the silence overwhelming, only counterpointed by the humming of the early traffic somewhere in the distance...The choir puts us in the right atmosphere with a lively rendition of “*Hali na, Jesus, hali na*”.

### ***Catholicism dented by sects***

The moment of Communion comes and the streams of communicants seem interminable. I can't help noticing some of them: the hesitant or embarrassed way they open their mouth or extend their hands to receive the Host reveals that it is something very unfamiliar... Are they prepared for it? Do they know what they are doing? Nowadays, all Catholic people go to Communion and very few go to confession...

The *Simbang Gabi* is so characteristic of this culture that many overseas workers time their vacations with the Christmas season in order to take part in it. It is a general phenomenon and yet so many Christian sects have considerably dented the Catholic masses. It is estimated that around 15 million Filipinos have left the Catholic Church in the last decades and joined the sects. A fact that is repeated in Latin America and more recently in Africa...To my understanding, that is the consequence of the number of pastors who come to evangelize our neglected masses.

It is true that there are many more seminaries and seminarians in the Philippines nowadays than in the past, but the population has in the meantime increased enormously. What can a young priest, alone in a parish of 30/50 thousand souls, do? The field is wide open for every kind of poachers! If the trend keeps on (and becomes a landslide!), will the *Simbang Gabi* disappear?

Christians in China almost disappeared in the XVIII century, when the emperor turned against Christianity and the pope suppressed the Society of Jesus. The flock was disbanded because it had no shepherds. I spent my youth as a missionary in Uganda and happily witnessed the swelling of the Catholic Church. I went back there six years ago and I found now more than 600 Christian denominations and growing by the day. In the last decades it is a fact that the missionary initiative has passed to the Pentecostals; Catholics have become dormant in the field of mission. The call of the Popes to "put out into the deep" was meant to awaken the missionary dynamism of the Catholic masses.

### ***Ten missionary guidelines***

The following are ten statements by Pope Francis about the way to go about announcing the Gospel to the present day world, taken from his recent document "*The Joy of the Gospel*". It is a heart-felt call to all the baptized in order for them to take Jesus' love "with new fervor and dynamism, in a permanent state of mission, overcoming the great risk of today's world: that of falling into an individualist cynicism and lack of joy".



1. The sign of God's welcoming attitude is to find churches with doors always open so that all those who are searching may not find the cold reception of a closed door.
2. Not even the doors of the Sacraments should be closed: for example, the Eucharist is "not a reward for the perfect, but a generous remedy and a nourishment for the weak".
3. Better a Church "wounded and dirty because out on the roads of the world" than a Church closed in a defensive attitude.
4. These are the temptations of pastoral workers: an individualistic attitude, identity crisis, a cooling off of fervor. We must be signs of hope, putting into practice the "revolution of tenderness", praying that God may free us from a worldly Church, often in pastoral or spiritual disguise.
5. Lay people who are often kept at the margin of the decision process by an exaggerated clericalism, should receive more responsibility and the young should be encouraged to take leading positions.
6. The present economic system is "unjust in its roots", because what prevails is the law of the stronger, where those who are excluded are exploited and become the left over, the refuse of society. "We are living a new, invisible tyranny of a market economy often considered like an idol, where financially playing the market, pervasive corruption and selfish tax evasion dominate".
7. The family is going through a deep cultural crisis, where "the post-modern and globalized individualism favors a lifestyle that perverts family ties".
8. A "Church poor for the poor" means that we understand that the poor have much to teach us and if and until their problems are not radically faced and solved, even the problems of the world will not find a solution.
9. Politics, so much reviled, is "one of the most precious forms of charity"; we must pray to God that he may grant us more politicians who may take at heart the life of the poor.
10. "Goodness by itself tends to spread", and every person who experiences a deep liberation from egoism, acquires a greater sensitivity as far as the needs of the neighbors are concerned. Whoever desires to live in fullness and dignity has no other way than recognize the others' good and contribute to it.

This is a generous and intelligent program. The important thing is to put it into practice. (Fr. L. C., MCCJ – February 2014)

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## SPIRITUAL REFLECTION: THE JOY OF THE SHEPHERD

# THE FIVE WAYS OF PENANCE

*The call to repentance and penance is central to the Gospel message. Far from being life-demeaning, the invitation to repentance is to be understood as a call to joy. Saint John the Baptist is the model of this joy. From the Fathers of the Church comes the very wise teaching of the five ways of penance. Nothing is more relevant and of present day importance for our journey of conversion and spiritual progress.*

*“Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:6-7)*

So great is the joy of the Shepherd that Jesus expresses his exultation, as many other times in the Gospel, with the paradox that God rejoices more for the conversion of one sinner than for the ninety-nine just people who do not need to convert. Of course, God is Father first of all to those who are always with him and he loves them dearly, with infinite generosity. So Jesus' sentence is only a way of stressing the joy of heaven for the conversion of sinners, since God doesn't enjoy punishing but forgiving and embracing all with his mercy; it should not be taken literally.

Penance is following Jesus, the God who makes us pass from death to life. Jesus in the Gospel invites his disciples to conversion and penance: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me” (*Mark* 8:27-38). Jesus’ invitation stresses the cost of discipleship and we can see it as the demand of our maturity as human beings created by God for love and fruitfulness. We cannot reach this maturity if do not come out of the prison of the ego. The instinctive self-centeredness must give way to an outgoing willingness to listen, to care and to love. This is the sense of Jesus’ invitation to renounce ourselves. That is the object of penance.

### ***Penance is grace and joy***

Contrary to the common assumption, penance does not imply sadness and despondency. The best disposition in order to embark on a journey of penance and conversion is Joy. In the Gospel of John we have the example of John the Baptist. He is already in prison and his disciples come to tell him that Jesus, the young prophet from Galilee who has received baptism from him is now preaching and the people flock to him. Far from showing jealousy, John says: “The bride is only for the bridegroom; and yet the bridegroom’s friend, who stands there and listens, is glad when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. This same joy I feel and now it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow smaller” (*John 3:27-36*).

Traditionally, in the experience and understanding of Christian spirituality, the bride is the soul, i.e. our true self. Thus, when our self comes out of the prison of the ego and makes herself available to God’s invitation and to Christ’s love advances, we should be happy, even if the process can be painful. We can easily adopt the beautiful sentence of Saint John the Baptist: “I must grow smaller, he must grow greater”.

It is in the writings of the Church Fathers that we find the traditional and very wise doctrine of the Five Ways of Penance.

### ***Awareness of my sins***

This is the first way of penance. The best example is in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the Publican or Tax-collector (*Luke 18:9-14*). Jesus praises the deep awareness of the Tax-collector and says that it was instrumental to his purification and God’s forgiveness. How strong is the awareness of my sins? The following questions will help me in this search: *Do I think that I am always right? Do I consider myself better than the others? Am I quick to judge other people? To condemn? Do I start my prayers seeking first of all for purification?*

### ***Mutual Forgiveness***

The second way of Penance is like a condition without which progress is impossible. This is what is clearly implied in the prayer that Jesus himself taught us, the Our Father: “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” (*Matthew 6:12*). In another passage, Jesus states: “If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go: first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”. The following

questions will help me to see clearly into my heart: *Am I in peace with everybody? Do I find easy to forgive? Do I take the first step? Can I pretend to pray without being in peace with everybody?* So, mutual forgiveness must follow and only then the way will be cleared for the next step.

### ***Prayer from the Heart***

If our heart is hardened by inordinate attachment to sinfulness, if our soul is: “Like a weary, dry land without water” (*Psalms* 63), the best exercise that will bring the necessary resiliency and openness is Prayer. This is the third way of Penance. The best example of this is Jesus’ exhortation to the apostles on the occasion of his agony in the Garden of Olives: “So you had no strength to keep awake with me one hour? You should be awake and pray not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (*Matthew* 26:40). So let me answer the following questions and see how I stand: *How much time do I give to personal prayer? Do I look for God in silence and solitude? Do I trust in God in difficult moments? Do I go to God in thankfulness and praise?*

### ***Fasting and Almsgiving***

“Jesus was rich but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty” (2 *Corinthians* 8:9). This wonderfully synthetic sentence gives us the way to enter in the attitude of penance which matches Jesus’ determination and act against our basic instincts by means of the very traditional paths of fasting and almsgiving. This is the forth way of Penance. I must first curb my pride by accepting the need of doing something against my pleasure-seeking tendency and my natural greed.

Fasting is not only about food or drink but about all the different addictions which may dominate my daily life. Thus, I can profitably ask myself: *What is my addiction: food, smoking, words, gossip, TV? Can I fast to make room for prayer, for God?*

Listening to the dire needs of the poor is the other way to dominate my instincts and grow in care and love. Poverty is not an excuse for not practicing almsgiving. Apart from money, the poor need our attention, care, appreciation. Thus the question: *What am I doing to help the poor?*

### ***Humility***

The fifth way of Penance is Humility. It is the point of arrival of the journey of Penance. Humility is truth about ourselves and our human condition. In the Gospel, it is called “poverty of spirit” (*Matthew* 5:3) and Jesus confers a blessing on this attitude. Jesus also puts it as condition for entering the Kingdom of God: “I tell you solemnly, unless you

change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (*Matthew* 18:3). In this case it is better called childlike attitude of humility. In concrete, it is self-acceptance and acceptance of the others as they are. Self-acceptance is the first step towards self-improvement. I may therefore usefully ask the following questions: *Do I accept myself as I am in peace and ask the Lord to make me better? Do I use the means God gives me to make myself better? Do I accept the others as they are and ask the Lord to teach me how to love them?*

## *Inner Freedom*

The hoped-for outcome of our journey of Penance is inner freedom: i.e. to liberate the energies of the better self and to make it open to love and to the cost of loving. Freedom doesn't mean indetermination, but it is a door open into love. It is the only way to return the love that God continually offers us in Jesus. "Do not run away from me. Come back to me- not once, not twice, but always again. You are my child. How can you ever doubt that I will embrace you again... I am your God, the God of mercy and compassion, the God of pardon and love, the God of tenderness and care".

“Please, do not say that I have given up on you, that I cannot stand you any more, that there is no way back. It is not true. I so much want you to be with me. I know all your thoughts. I hear all your words. I see all your actions. And I love you because you are beautiful, made in my own image, an expression of my most intimate love. Do not judge yourself. Do not condemn yourself. Do not reject yourself. Let my love touch the deepest, most hidden corners of your heart and reveal to you your own beauty, a beauty that you have lost sight of, but which will become visible to you again in the light of my mercy”.

This is the voice of Jesus who calls us always to return to him who created us in love and re-created us in mercy and wants to keep doing so. (Fr. L. C., MCCJ- March 2018)

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THE HIDDEN TREASURE:

# **OUR BAPTISMAL PRIESTHOOD**

Vatican II rediscovered the common priesthood of the faithful and yet people still think that only the Priests have the full responsibility of Christian life. To find this treasure can change the perception of our life and can give a new, more balanced and harmonious view of the church and un-tap unsuspected energies from the new

awareness of the laity, their priestly  
conscience and spirituality.

&&&&&&&&&&

## **WE ARE ALL PRIESTS**

*Baptism makes all Christian Priests, in as much as it unites and grafts them to the body of Christ. It consecrates them so that with their presence in the world they may insure the continuous manifestation of the communion between God and Humanity.*

Since at least forty years ago, theology and the official teaching of the Pope and Bishops insist on a priestly reading of our Christian experience; and yet, even today, when we hear the words “Priests” or “Priesthood”, it is exclusively in order to designate the ordained minister. The very idea of Baptismal Priesthood has not yet succeeded in penetrating the mentality or even the common vocabulary of our Christian communities.

This realization of the little progress that the Christian community has made in receiving and assimilating the Council teaching about the Baptismal Priesthood of the faithful continues the persistent danger of over-emphasizing the ministerial priesthood and its importance (*clericalism*).

It is high time that we understood that we are all Priests!

Vatican II rediscovered the common priesthood of the faithful and yet people still think that only the Priests have the full responsibility of Christian life. The underlying prejudice that Christian life is the Priest’s affair lingers on. It is as if Jesus had died only

for the Priests and the Lay People almost have pity for them and help them to carry the burden of things that in reality are theirs!

A change of mentality is necessary from everybody's part. We must try to overturn our reasoning. Jesus came to save everybody; he died so that all may be saved. Jesus' consuming passion was to save humankind, to make people able to praise God, to live in communion with him and with all the other human beings. This is the content of Jesus priestly mission that continues in his priestly people, the Church.

This doesn't mean to belittle the function or the dignity of the ordained ministers. St. Francis Assisi, who did not want to be ordained as a Priest because he thought he was unworthy, used to say that if he had met an angel walking with a Priest, he would have greeted first the Priest and then the angel! One of the things that move me very deeply and that I met only in the Philippines, is the children coming to me at the end of the Mass for the blessing: *Mano po! Mano po!*

### ***Jesus' priesthood: a mediation of love***

All this is beautiful, but what about the baptismal priesthood? It is like the hidden treasure that most people have forgotten the existence of.

To discover this treasure can change the perception of our life and can give a new, more balanced and harmonious view of the church and un-tap unsuspected energies from the new awareness of the laity, their priestly conscience and spirituality.

But to understand our baptismal priesthood we must first have an insight on the priesthood of Jesus of which our priesthood is the extension and the continuation. Jesus was not a ritual priest; he did not belong to the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe. He did not perform the priestly rites sacrificing animals.

The term that the Bible uses to describe Jesus' salvific work under the aspect of priesthood is "mediator": Jesus is the bridge-builder (*pontifex*), the one who had bridged the infinite gap between God and Humanity. He did this by loving us to the end and accepting in his body the consequences of his genuine love faced with evil.

Jesus' priesthood is mediation of love. His sacrifice is his body offered once and for all on the cross. At the eve of his passion, during the last supper, Jesus invented the



Eucharist to declare publicly and to celebrate his salvific death out of love. He then went out of the upper room to face his enemies and to die. The fulfillment of his mediation of love is on Mount Calvary. That is the new Passover.

The Church continues Christ's mystery and mission: Christians are a priestly people: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people at all and now you are the People of God; once you were outside the mercy and now you have been given the mercy"* (1 Peter 2:9-10).

### ***There is no more temple***

All the believers can then say: It is wonderful to live the Gospel, to continue the mission of Jesus. We want to make the Gospel shine in the family, in the workplace, where people study and trade, in all human relationships.

This is the new worship that pleases God: not made of sacrifices outside the self, cut off from life, bloody sacrifices of animals... Our life will be the acceptable sacrifice, our affections, our love, our work... This is what the first Christians had understood when they stopped going to the temple, and stopped to ask the priest to slaughter a calf or a lamb for them.

There is no more temple: only the body of Jesus and our body; no more sacrifice of animals, only Jesus' sacrifice of self on the cross. As for us God does not expect anything but our communion of life with him and our solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

### ***The living presence of Jesus***

And what about the Priests? They are the ministers of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the Celebration of our Priesthood. Moreover, they stand among us as the living presence of Jesus among his people and help the faithful make of their lives a gift to God and to the brethren, as a shepherd does with his sheep. Therefore Priests are at the service of the laity, not vice versa!

There is a conversion to be done: the common priesthood of the faithful (the baptismal priesthood) is a true priesthood, not only a figurative one. It is the most important and it belongs to everybody.

The baptismal priesthood is a real priesthood, an existential priesthood that gives the capacity of making of one's life a gift to God, a "spiritual sacrifice": *"Think of God's mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God. Do not model yourselves on the behavior of the world around you, but let your behavior change, modeled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what is that God wants, what is the perfect things to do"* (Romans 12:1-2)

To be precise, there is only one Priesthood: it is the one of the people of God, the priestly people whom Christ associates to his priesthood, and within it there is the function of the Ministerial Priesthood.

The whole Christian people continues Christ' mediation of love throughout time and space.

[illegible]

# A TRADITIONAL VIEW

*It is amazing how the concept of Baptismal Priesthood, in its implications for the life of the faithful, is already developed in the tradition as we can see in the ancient Christian writers called The Fathers of the Church.*

We see in them well developed a priestly spirituality of the faithful. The emphasis on the ordained minister is no yet there. It will appear especially after the Reformation

had denied the Ministerial Priesthood and, consequently, the Council of Trent was obliged to concentrate on it, not only in the affirmations of principle but in the practical deliberations.

It is in that time (the XVI century) that seminaries for the training and formation of the ordained ministers (the Clergy) are started. The consequence is a clergy better formed, but also an emphasis put on the Ministerial Priesthood. The Baptismal Priesthood goes into hibernation almost to the point of oblivion, only to be rediscovered by the modern emergence of the laity and the teaching of Vatican II.

It is therefore most interesting to see that we consider a modern conquest, was already present so beautifully in the tradition as these passages from the Fathers of the Church show.

*“When I give what I own, when I carry my cross and follow Christ, then I offer a sacrifice on the altar of God. When I burn my body in the fire of love and gain the glory of martyrdom, then I offer myself as holocaust on the altar of God. When I love my brothers and sisters to the point of offering my life for them, when I fight to death for justice and truth, when I mortify my flesh abstaining from carnal concupiscence, when I am crucified to the world and the world is crucified to me, I then offer again a sacrifice of holocaust on the altar of God... then I become a priest that offers his own sacrifice”* (Origen 4<sup>th</sup> century).

*“Although the Church is ordered in various ranks so that the whole is made up of different members, yet (as Paul says) we are all one in Christ. Office does not constitute between members a division such that the insignificance of any part affects its union with the head.*

*And so we say that in the unity of our faith and baptism we enjoy an undivided fellowship and a dignity common to us all; which the most blessed apostle Peter expressed in his inspired words: “like living stones be yourself built up into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”. And further on he says: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people”.*

*In baptism, the sign of the cross makes kings of all who are reborn in Christ, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them as Priests. So, apart from the particular*

*obligations of our ministry, any Christian who has the gift of rational and spiritual understanding knows he is a member of a kingly race and shares in the priestly office.*

*For what could be more royal than a soul which by subjecting itself to God becomes ruler of his own body? Or what more priestly when consecrates a pure conscience to God and offers the spotless sacrifice of his devotion on the altar of his heart? By the grace of God this is common to all.*

*But it is also a gracious and religious thing to you that on the day of my consecration you rejoice as for an honor that is your own. Thus the one sacrament that confers the High Priesthood is celebrated in the whole body of the Church. When the oil of consecration is poured, the grace flows more abundantly over the higher orders indeed, but it flows unsparingly too over the lower” (Leo the Great, 5<sup>th</sup> century).*

I received great enlightenment from a famous sentence of Saint Augustine: “*With you I am a Christian, for you I am a Bishop*”. In the same way, I can say: “With you I am a member of the Baptismal Priesthood; for you I am a Priest, meaning a member of the Ministerial Priesthood; It is more important for me to belong to the Baptismal Priesthood than a Ministerial one, as it is more important for Augustine to be a Christian than to be a Bishop.

As a conclusion, we can quote the other famous sentence of Saint Augustine who writes: *“As we call everyone ‘Christians’ in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone “Priests” because all are members of the only one Priest”*.

[illegible]

## A PRIESTLY SPIRITUALITY

*THIS IS OUR PRIESTLY LIFE AND MINISTRY: WE ARE CHALLENGED TO LIVE OUT OUR PRIESTHOOD IN OUR DAILY LIFE: IT IS AN OUTWARD LOOKING PRIESTHOOD, A WORSHIP WHICH IS EXERCISED NOT IN THE TEMPLE BUT ALONG THE ROADS, IN THE MEETING PLACES, WORK PLACES, IN THE PLACES OF JOY AND SUFFERING OF HUMANITY. IT IS OUR MEDIATION OF LOVE.*

## ***The Priesthood of the Church***

We are a priestly people because Christ associates us to his priesthood. The Church shares Christ's priesthood, since her characteristic is to be a visible and tangible sign and instrument of the mystery that has taken place in the Son of God.

Baptism makes all Christians Priests. The teaching of Vatican II about the common priesthood of the faithful is summed up and developed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988). The sharing of the Priesthood of Christ is described in its implications for the life of the faithful and becomes a participation in the very Mission of Christ: *"With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation, the baptized share in the same mission of Jesus as the Christ, the Savior-Messiah"* (CL 13)

All the faithful are sharers in the Priestly mission for which Jesus offered himself on the cross and continues to be offered in the celebration of the Eucharist, for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity.

Incorporated in Jesus Christ, the Baptized are united to him and to his sacrifice in the offering they make of themselves and their daily activities. Speaking of the lay faithful the Council says: "for their work, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labor, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit – and even the hardships of life if patiently borne – all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

"During the celebration of the Eucharist these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. Thus worshippers whose every deed is holy, the lay faithful, consecrate the world itself to God".

## ***Mediation of Life***

The essence of Christ's priesthood is mediation. The first aspect of this mediation is the mediation of life. It implies a conversion, a radical change of perspective; it centers mainly on love: it is in loving that we offer the sacrifice of self. It is first of all a peaceful

sacrifice, consisting in the gift of self. Very soon it becomes a painful gift (we cannot love seriously without coming up against suffering), therefore a sacrifice that resembles the one of the Cross.

We are Priests because we offer spiritual sacrifices, embraced in the power and with the grace of the Holy Spirit. The shedding of blood is no longer required; it was abolished once and for all by sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. But it can become part of our sharing the priesthood of Christ in the case of martyrdom.

This mediation of life is embodied in the universal call to holiness: a traditional principle that has come to the fore in the spirituality of our modern times (starting with St. Francis de Sales in his classic book: *Introduction to Devout Life*) and made official by Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, ch.5).

Faced by the pervasive secularization process in our society, John Paul II has played the card of holiness, emphasizing the importance of the Saints in the life of the Church. No Pope has made so many saints, taking them from all walks of life.

### ***Mediation of witness***

Our living in a priestly attitude soon becomes expressed in the way we act, speak and relate. It is first of all witness of life itself: like Saint Francis of Assisi who considered the silent being in the midst of the world, in the modesty and humility of the imitation of Christ, already a form of preaching.

But of course we are also bound by Jesus' great commission: Go to the whole world and announce the good news to all peoples. The mystery of Jesus, his salvific death and resurrection by which he is the High Priest of the New Testament, is the object of our proclamation. We are witnesses of all that has taken place through the Incarnation and Redemption in order to call all people to the obedience of faith.

This is the prophetic and missionary aspect of our priesthood. The missionary dimension of our baptismal faith has also emerged from the theology and spirituality of the modern times and is reflected powerfully in Vatican II: the universal responsibility for the spreading of the Gospel (*Ad Gentes*).

### ***The mediation of secularity***

The novelty of Christian life is the foundation and title for equality among all the baptized in Christ. As members of the people of God, they share a common dignity; they have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection, the same mission.

Because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the Church's mission.

But among the lay faithful this one baptismal dignity takes on a manner of life that Vatican II has described as the "secular character". Already Pious XII had envisaged the Christian laity at the frontline of the Church: "The faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the frontlines of the Church's life; for them the Church is the animating principle for human society. Therefore, they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church".

The secular character of the mediation of love of the faithful is such not only in a sociological sense, but especially in a theological sense. The term *secular* must be understood in the light of the act of God, the creator and redeemer, who has handed over the world to women and men, so that they may participate in the work of creation, free creation from the influence of sin and sanctify themselves in marriage or celibate life, in a family, in a profession and in the various activities of society.

### ***An outward looking priesthood***

We may say that Christians are sent by Christ in order to prolong his priestly action throughout history: in this action the Church lives out her being the sacrament of the communion that unites God to humanity and humanity to God, communicating to the world that divine life that she herself enjoys.

It is therefore an outward looking priesthood, to the service of the world, and in this sense realizing a worship or cult which is exercised not in the temple but along the roads, in the meeting places, work places, in the places of joy and suffering.

From the Baptismal Priesthood there flows therefore a consequent Baptismal Ministry that brings together all the faithful and precedes the differences from specific charisms or ministries proper of each other. This is the basic ministeriality that flows from the responsibility of all faithful or the common mission.

The Word of God, the liturgy, the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, must be understood and lived not as activities closed within themselves, but open to the world, so that we may be able to fulfill our “Spiritual Priesthood” in our concrete life situations, there where the Lord calls us to live and witness the truth of his Gospel.

[illegible]

## THE ORIGINALITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

*It is essential to penetrate the originality of the priesthood of Jesus as the High Priest of the New Testament. The priesthood of Christ is the expression of his absolute “newness” in salvation history and constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all Christians.*

Priests are not often mentioned in the Gospels. When they are mentioned, they appear malevolent and the most active in bringing Jesus to death.

Jesus applies the title “Priest” (Greek: *hierus*) neither to himself nor to his disciples. In the Gospels, however, Jesus states repeatedly that he is giving up his life as a sacrifice for our sins, so that we may be saved and possess the fullness of life.



The designation of Priest is first applied to the Christian community (1 Pt 2:5, *confer* Ex 19:6). The Church, as the new Israel, has a priestly character because of its election and consecration.

The originality of Christ's priesthood as the comprehensive category that embraces his entire work of salvation is theologically developed very early in tradition by the author of the letter to the Hebrews.

### ***A unique Priesthood***

MEDIATION is the term used in the New Testament, especially in the letter to the Hebrews, to describe or define the mission of the Priest: to bridge the infinite gap between God and Humanity (*Pontifex*=bridge-builder).

Mediation describes the essence of the mission of Priesthood and Priesthood on its turn embraces all the other theological categories that we find in the New Testament to describe Jesus Christ's work and mission: Salvation/Redemption/Liberation.

Jesus Christ mediates first of all with his life because of the Incarnation: he is anointed as Priest since his conception, when his Blessed Humanity is joined with the Divine Nature. But he mediates also dynamically because he learned through obedience and suffering to be a compassionate mediator.

The final and conclusive mediation is accomplished by Jesus through his Pascal Mystery: *by the sacrifice of self*, accepted in obedience to the Father's will, Jesus mediated our peace with God and the new and everlasting covenant/testament by which we find a definite salvation in the name of Jesus.

### ***The ultimate sacrifice***

Christ's mediation of sacrifice is the crucial mediation, the climax of Christ's priestly mission and work and what constitutes the object of the theological reflection of the letter to the Hebrews. It is also the area in which the originality of Christ's mediation shines. This is how Christ' mediation of sacrifice is presented:

*“Bull’s blood and goats’ blood are useless for taking away sins, and this is what he said, on coming into the world: You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me. You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices from sin; then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, ‘God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will... And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ...*

*In other words, brothers, through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary, by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body. And we have the supreme high priest over all the house of God” (Hebrews 10: 4-21).*

The concept of sacrifice according to Rene' Girard, French philosopher and anthropologist, is completely changed by Christ. The Gospel contains for the first time the story of an innocent victim, Jesus, betrayed by his very friends, persecuted, but triumphant over evil at the same time that he rejects it and prefers to be crucified instead.

A new God of love, the God who defends the victims, is openly manifested in the person of his only begotten Son, overturning from within the violent structures in which human life has traditionally based itself.

Girard defends Christianity as the coming of age of humanity, a crucial transition stage from the violence of all *against one* as it is in the violent resolution of *the scapegoat*. Every culture, every myth is based on the scapegoat, there is only one text that in a complete manner reveals the violent mechanism of the traditional approach and proclaims the innocence of the victim: the Bible.

The Christian God, the God of the victims, Jesus Christ, denies violence in the most radical fashion because he submits to it without surrendering to it, without becoming violent. All those who react to violence with violence, they apparently do not submit to it but in reality they surrender to it in as much as they own it and perpetuate it while wanting to get rid of it. In this way, violence is continued, not overcome.

It is Jesus, the mediator of love, who really brings humanity to its maturity.

[illegible]

## **SERVANTS OF THE REAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST**

### ***Celebrating our Priesthood***

Speaking of our Baptismal Priesthood as the way we share the Priesthood of Christ, we necessarily encounter the Eucharist in which the Priesthood of Christ, and of the Church together with Christ, is celebrated.

The Eucharist has a central position in the life of the Church: it is therefore vital to understand its depth and relevance together with its role, in order to have a priestly reading of our Christian life, to develop a priestly spirituality. Does the Eucharist represent the whole exercise of the priesthood of Christ and of the Church? Does the Eucharist, as it were, exhaust the priesthood of Christ?

### ***The Eucharist is the Christian Passover***

The Passover is both the intervention of God to free His people and the ceremonial meal. The Passover meal is presented as having preceded the actual events of God's intervention to liberate his people and then remained as the ritual memorial of that event that was meant to continue in the life of the faithful Israelites of every generation.

In the same manner, the Eucharist represents the way Jesus announced openly and celebrated his coming death on the Cross during the Last Supper, before the actual event of our salvation took place.

The real Passover takes place on Calvary: it is the death of Jesus followed by the Resurrection.

Afterwards, and up to now, the Eucharist was and is the ritual memorial of that event, with the originality of Jesus' real, sacramental presence. It is meant to help the

followers of Jesus to live out the mystery of their association to the Priesthood of Christ in their everyday life.

### ***The Pascal Mystery and the Eucharistic Mystery***

The setting of the last supper and the institution of the Eucharist is strictly linked with the happenings of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, as it is clearly and suggestively put by John Paul II in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2002):

“At every celebration of the Eucharist, we are spirituality brought back to the events of the evening of Holy Thursday, to the Last Supper and to what followed it on Holy Friday and Saturday.

Once again we see Jesus as he leaves the Upper Room, descends with his disciples to the Kidron valley and goes to the Garden of Olives. Even today that garden shelters some very ancient olive trees. Perhaps they witnessed what happened beneath their shade that evening, when Christ in prayer was filled with anguish and his sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground (Luke 22:44).

The blood which shortly before Jesus had given to the Church as the drink of salvation in the sacrament of the Eucharist, began to be shed; its outpouring would then be completed on Golgotha to become the means of our redemption: Christ, as High Priest of the good things to come, entered once and for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12)” (EDE 3).

The Church was born of the Paschal Mystery. And yet the Pascal Mystery is different from the Eucharistic Mystery. On Holy Friday, no Eucharistic is celebrated to make us realize that difference.

But the Eucharist is the sacrament of the Paschal Mystery: “We announce your death, o Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection, until you come in glory”. The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and the effect of receiving him in holy communion are stated beautifully in the traditional antiphon: *O Sacrum Convivium*: “O sacred banquet in which Christ is eaten, the memory of his passion is recalled, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of future glory is given to us!”

### *Servants of the real presence of Jesus*

The ministerial priesthood has a distinct role to play in making Christ present to his Church, his priestly people. As Vatican II teaches, the faithful join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood, yet it is the ordained Priest who, acting in the person of Christ, brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people.

At the head of his people, at the altar, the Priest stands like Jesus, in the place of Jesus, in a specific sacramental identification with the eternal High Priest who is the author and principal subject of this sacrifice of his, a sacrifice in which, in truth, nobody can take his place.

And so, strengthened by the Eucharist, the people of God go back to the world, to the market place, to schools and offices, to the fields: to the joy and torment of continuing, in the different circumstances of their lives, Christ's mediation of love.

*Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ*

*January 2005*

# TRANSFORMING EUCHARIST

## Introduction

CELEBRATING THE EUCHARIST WITH MARY. The year of the Rosary/the the year of the Eucharist: they are proposals, invitations that spring from the original, **prophetic commission of the pope in NMI: Duc in Altum!** Plunge into the sea of history, in this case, into the future, with the enthusiasm of a new evangelization.

The program set before the Church at the dawn of the Third Millennium of Christianity is **to contemplate the face of Christ** (there is no other program, only Christ!); to contemplate it with Mary; to contemplate the face of Christ in the most precious gift that he gave to his Church, the Eucharist, in which the Paschal Mystery is made present in every time and place.

In this conversation, we shall contemplate the face of Christ as the **High Priest of the New Testament** who extends his Priesthood to his Church, the priestly people. In the light of the Priesthood of Christ, we shall rediscover our Baptismal Priesthood by which we are all priests and we shall meditate on the consequences or implications of our **priestly spirituality for our everyday life.**

The point of departure is EDE especially in **two passages** in which John Paul II brings some personal experience, two beautiful passages that conclude with a synthetic view of the Priesthood of Christ and of the Church.

“The Church was born of the Paschal Mystery. For this very reason, the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding way the sacrament of the paschal mystery, stands at the **centre of the Church’s life**. This is already clear from the earliest images of the Church found in the Acts of the Apostles: They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers (2:42).

The breaking of bread refers to the Eucharist. Two thousand years later, we continue to relive that primordial image of the Church. At every celebration of the Eucharist, we are spiritually brought back to the paschal Triduum: to the events of the evening of Holy Thursday, to the last supper and to what follow it.

The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the events which were about to take place, beginning with the agony in Gethsemane. Once again we see Jesus as he leaves the upper room, descends with his disciples to the Kidron valley and goes to the garden of olives. Even today that garden shelters some very ancient olive trees. Perhaps they witnessed what happened under their shade that evening, when Christ in prayer was filled with anguish and his cold sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground (Luke 22:44).

The blood which shortly before he had given to the Church as the drink of salvation in the sacrament of the Eucharist, **began to be shed**; its outpouring would then be completed on Golgotha to become the means of our redemption: Christ, as high priest of the good things to come, entered once and for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:11-12)”(EDE,3).

It is a marvelous number in which the whole encyclical letter is contained, which joins the present with the past and gives the feeling of the historical depth of the Eucharist. The other passage is even more personal and moving and gives the cosmic dimension of the Eucharist, the horizontal perspective of space.

‘When I think of the Eucharist, and look at my life as a priest, as a Bishop and as the Successor of Peter, I naturally recall the many times and places in which I was able to celebrate.

I remember the parish church of Niegowi, where I had my first pastoral assignment, the collegiate church of Saint Florian in Krakow, Wawel cathedral, Saint Peter's basilica and so many basilicas and churches in Rome and throughout the world. I have been able to celebrate Holy Mass in chapels built along mountain paths, or lakeshores or seacoasts; I have celebrated it on altars built in stadiums and in city squares...

This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some ways celebrated **on the altar of the world**. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing.

He, the eternal High Priest who by the blood of his Cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation redeemed. He does so through the ministry of the Church, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the *mysterium fidei* which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ"(EDE,8).

### **The Eucharist: source of missionary energy:**

1. The two disciples of Emmaus: "*They set out immediately*" (Luke 24:23) in order to report what they had seen and heard. Once we have truly met the Risen One by partaking of his body and blood, we cannot keep for ourselves the joy we have experienced. "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1Cor 11:26).

**The joy of the encounter with Christ** cannot be contained, it becomes Mission. "If your experience of God is not an experience of Joy, you have no right to be a missionary".

2. John Paul II, in his new book: *ALZATEVI, ANDIAMO!* (Mondadori 2004), brings the imperative words of Jesus to the disciples, after the agony in the Garden, as



referred by Mark's Gospel (Mk 14:42). Revisiting with bold strokes the experience of being chosen as a bishop of Krakow, the Pope speaks of **faith and courage**.

He wanted very much to visit the places of Abraham, our father in faith, starting with Ur in Mesopotamia (Iraq), during the Great Jubilee Year 2000, but he could not reach the interior of Iraq.

He wanted to draw inspiration from Abraham, because he is a model of faith and courage even for Jesus who mentioned his faith, in the Gospel of John ("Your father Abraham *rejoiced to think that he would see my Day; he saw it and was glad*" ( John 8:6). He understood the call/need **to believe and to do the will of God** as Abraham, without knowing where it will take us.

"I'm speaking from this place (the Vatican) where Christ my Savior has brought me, asking me to come out of my country, so that I may bear fruit in abundance in another place, a fruit that will last (John 15:16).

Re-echoing the words of my Lord and Master, I myself repeat to each one of you, my dearest brother Bishops: ALZATEVI, ANDIAMO! (Stand up and let us go!), let us go, trusting in Christ. He it will be that will accompany us on our journey until the target that He alone knows".

FAITH AND COURAGE! This stressing of courage by our ailing and aged pope, reminds me of the last words of Saint Daniel Comboni from his death-bed: CORAGGIO PER IL PRESENTE, MA SPECIALMENTE PER IL FUTURO!

At page 57 of the same book, the pope speaks of his coming to Manila: "In Manila... there were millions of young men and women. In Manila I had in front of my eyes the whole of Asia. How many millions of people in that continent who do not know Christ! I put an enormous hope in the dynamic churches of the Philippines and Chorea.

**ASIA: this is our common cause (task) for the Third Millennium".**

**3.** In nature, every being gives and receives energy. We have the **testimony of Teilhard de Chardin**: his mystical view of the presence of God's creative power in evolution: matter becomes energy, energy in man becomes consciousness, consciousness

becomes holiness in Christ who is the Omega Point of the evolution/development of the universe.

The great scholar in pale-anthropology is especially a great mystic according to the Ignatian spirituality: to see God in everything. Teilhard de Chardin has written one very influential book of spirituality: *Le Milieu Divin* (The Divine Ambience): Jesus is the place, the ambience, the milieu where God accomplishes the most striking change which is to change our human consciousness into love.

He has written also a booklet: *Le Mass sur le Monde* (The Mass on the World) in which he adores the presence of the creative power of God in matter. The Eucharistic miracle of transubstantiation is, in a certain sense, realized in nature by the energies of evolution: matter becomes Christ! In this sense the world is an altar, an immense altar for the celebration of this Mass on the world.

## **II. The Eucharist: pattern and plan of Mission:**

The Eucharist is not only source of missionary energy, but plan and pattern of Mission. And this because **the Eucharist is a mode of being**. It is a transforming experience as we are going to see at length.

1. THANKSGIVING first of all. To God's salvific initiative in Jesus, we answer: Yes, Thank you, Amen! This gratitude is witness of our vital dependence on God in front of a secularized society, forgetful of God and in vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency.

Thanksgiving for the quality of life as participation in the mystery of Christ so that our face reflects Christ's face: joyful and sorrowful face. The quality of life that we receive in the Eucharist is called life eternal. Card. C.M. Martini elaborates this concept with the following reflection: Jesus says: "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal" (John 6:54): this is the promise of a life, an experience of life from which all loss is banned, all the anxiety of losing is taken away (fear of death and its anticipation like failure, loneliness, being losers in this world, frustration, confusion, fatigue, sickness...). The one who eats Jesus will have a life that from now on will chase away the fear of losing/ being losers: job, boyfriend, girlfriend, prestige, money...

2. A MODE OF BEING AND ACTING: this aspect is developed in the following part under the title:

### III. Transforming Eucharist:

The Eucharist is a sacrament of transformation. We can recall the famous book: *Transforming Mission*. Card. Ratzinger develops this aspect of the Eucharist **in six stages**:

#### 1. *Transformation of the body into a gift:*

Jesus doesn't say only: "This is my body", but: "This is my body which is given for you". It can become gift because it is given. By means of the act of giving, it becomes "capable of communicating", it has transformed itself into a gift. The same is for the wine "blood which is poured for you". Because it is shed, in as much as it is shed, it can be given.

#### 2. *Transformation of an act of violence into an act of love:*

We proceed to consider a more profound level of transformation. Jesus transform from within the act of violent men against him, into an act of giving on behalf of these men: into an act of love. He does not answer violence with violence, but he puts an end to violence by transforming it into love. Violence is defeated by love.

This is the fundamental transformation upon which all is based. Jesus loved us and offered himself for us out of love. His sacrifice is first of all the gift of self. It becomes the violent shedding of his blood for us because Jesus is faced by the presence of evil in the world: He surrendered himself to the will of the Father and the need of the brethren and the unavoidable consequences of genuine love faced by evil.

The **concept of sacrifice** according to Rene' Girard, French philosopher and anthropologist, is completely changed by Christ. The Gospel contains for the first time the story of an innocent victim, Jesus, betrayed by his very friends, persecuted, but triumphant over evil at the same time that he rejects it and prefers to be crucified instead.

A new God of love, the God who defends the victims, is openly manifested in the person of his only begotten Son, overturning from within the violent structures on which human life has traditionally based itself.

**Girard defends Christianity as the coming of age of humanity**, a crucial transition stage from the violence of *all against one* as it is in the violent resolution of the *scapegoat*. Every culture, every myth is based on the scapegoat, there is only one text that in a complete manner reveals the violent mechanism of the traditional approach and proclaims the innocence of the victim: the Bible.

The Christian God, the God of the victims, Jesus Christ, denies violence in the most radical fashion because he submits to it without surrendering to it, without becoming violent. All those who react to violence with violence, they apparently do not submit to it but in reality they surrender to it in as much as they own it and perpetuate it while wanting to get rid of it. In this way, violence is continued, not overcome. It is Jesus, the mediator of love, who really brings humanity to its maturity.

### ***Transformation of death into life:***

The dead body becomes a risen body. This is because Jesus God, he defeats death accomplished in the Resurrection. In the transformation of the resurrection, all the fullness of Christ continues to subsist, but transformed in this way: a gift for us in the Spirit. Now to be a body and to want to give self, to make the gift of self are no longer mutually exclusive, but are implicit in each other.

At the moment of the last supper, Christ anticipated the event of Calvary. He accepted the death on the Cross and with his acceptance transformed the act of violence into an act of giving, self-giving poured forth for us. “Even if I am to be poured forth as a libation on the sacrificial offering of your faith” (Phil 2:17), St. Paul says on the basis of this and in regard to his own imminent martyrdom.

At the last supper, the cross is already present, accepted and transformed by Jesus. The second and third transformation acquire salvific value because Jesus is God and therefore his suffering has an infinite value.

#### ***4. Transformation of the bread and wine into the body and the blood of Jesus: Gifts of Creation of Human Labor***

On the basis of the second and third transformation, the sacramental transformation becomes possible: it is the Risen Jesus, a spirit that gives life, who changes the bread and wine into his body and the blood to communicate with us and transform us.

The act of self giving is not something from him, but it is himself. Whereas the food that we eat is assimilated into our system, in the Eucharistic communion, it is Jesus, the Risen Lord, who gives us his Spirit, the transforming agent that assimilates us to our Master.

The transformation of the gifts, which is only the continuation of the fundamental transformation of the cross and of the resurrection, is not the final point, but only a beginning. The purpose of the Eucharist is the transformation of those who receive it in authentic communion.

#### ***5. Transformation of the communicants into one body: Christ.***

The end is unity, that peace which we, as separate individual who live beside one another or in conflict with one another, become with Christ and in him, as **one organism of self-giving**, to live in view of the resurrection and a new world.

#### ***6. Transformation of the world, of Creation into a dwelling place for God.***

A significant consequence of the **eschatological tension** inherent in the Eucharist is also the fact that it spurs us on our journey through history and increases our responsibility for the world today. It is our task to contribute with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more humane world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan.

Many problems darken the horizon of our time. . . What should we say of the thousand inconsistencies of a globalized world where the weakest, the most powerless and the poorest appear to have so little hope? The Eucharistic spirit of service shown by Jesus in the washing of Eucharistic Spirit in the feet is more than ever necessary to our present day world.

Proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes (1Cor 11:26) entails a commitment to transforming the world in accordance to the Gospel: Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:20). This entails a commitment to SOCIAL JUSTICE at the service of the last, the poorest. The mystique of the washing of the feet: “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all (Mark 9:35).

By our mutual love and our concern for those in need, we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (John 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the **authenticity** of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.

The sacred meal can be a **judgment of condemnation** if we do not live our mutual love, if we make null and void the Lord’s work of Redemption, his body given for the life of the world. The Eucharist is the occasion to verify if we are really the Body of Christ i.e. strictly associated to Him in the journey towards unity by his sacrificial love of the world.

The Eucharist is banquet of hope: when we celebrate the Eucharist, we link our present situation, provisional, uncertain, full of temptations and sin that turning point which is the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, who gives certainty to our journey toward the future.

## CONCLUSION:

Amazing: **amazement and gratitude!** To rekindle this Eucharistic amazement is the purpose of *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* (EDE) and of the year of the Eucharist: **amazement (wonderment, wonder, surprise, marvel “stupore”, “meraviglia”) is the fruit of contemplation.** In the Eucharist, we contemplate the face of Jesus who is really present with all his mystery.

**Amazement** at the enormity of the gift: incomparable treasure. “May all of you, the Christian faithful, rediscover the gift of the Eucharist as light and strength for your daily life in the world, in the exercise of your respective professions amid so many different situations. Rediscover this above all in order to discover fully the beauty and the mission of the family” (MND 30).

AVE VERUM CORPUS NATUM DE MARIA VERGINE, VERE PASSUM,  
IMMOLATUM IN CRUCE PRO HOMINE, CUIUS LATUS PERFORATUM FLUXIT  
AQUA ET SANGUINE, ESTO NOBIS PRAEGUSTATUM MORTIS IN EXAMINE. O  
JESU DULCIS! O JESUS PIE! O JESU FILI MARIAE!

*Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ*

*Calamba, 2003*