

PERSONAL INVESTIGATIONS



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By

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PERSONAL INVESTIGATIONS

Table of Contents

Meditation on the Mystery of Time

The Pilgrimage

Witness and Martyrdom

The Priesthood of Christ and of the Church

The Sacred Heart of Jesus

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Foreword

The first two booklets represent personal enquiries and meditations originated by the occurrence of the Great Jubilee Year 2000, in margin to the rich and thought-provoking teaching of pope John Paul II on that occasion. The “Priesthood of Christ and of the Church” is particularly developed since it represents my favourite topic (*Fr. Lorenzo C., 2021*).

Also in T. S. Eliot we find the image of the river. To look for the origin, to search for the source of the river is an instinct and a necessity... Going back to the source of the river is to go back to one's childhood. There is the need of re-owning one's childhood; of bringing one's life into unity. There is a consistence in the life of a person between the images of childhood and the achievements of mature age or adulthood. To re-possess one's past is to discover one's history as salvation history.

There is also the image of the river as applied to the life of the community, especially the Church. That was the sense of the celebrations of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, as it is well expressed by Pope John Paul II: 'The whole of Christian history appears to us as a single river, into which many tributaries pour their waters.

The year 2000 invites us to gather with a renewed fidelity and ever deeper communion along the banks of this great river: the river of Revelation, of Christianity and of the Church, a river that flows through human history starting from the event which took place at Nazareth and then at Bethlehem two thousand years ago. This is truly the river which with its streams, in the expression of the psalm, 'makes glad the city of God' (40:4)" (TMA, 25).

The river of time has its interruption, its waterfall (according again to an image by T. S. Eliot): it is the irruption of God, of eternity, into the flow of human history through the Incarnation. This "***Intersection***" which divides time and history into two, **Before Christ and After Christ**, is eventually the present in which the irruption of God is actualized in liturgy and prayers.

We shall first **deepen the concept of time** and its implications in relation to salvation history and our individual existence. We shall proceed, in a second movement, to **see how we can pray the "sentiment of time"**

- as *meditation on the transient nature* of our life on earth and all created realities;
- as *thanksgiving* for the time received and redeemed;
- as *repentance* for the time wasted and the missed opportunities;
- as *surrender in God's hands for the future* which is coming, and invocation to the Spirit of the Risen Christ to bring into unity the dimensions of time in the **sacrament of the present moment**: here and now is the Intersection between Time and

Eternity; it is in the present moment that the Divine breaks into Time, when we meet God's Divine Initiative and it becomes a Call for us.

1.

The concept of time and its articulations

Time is defined as *the measure of the movement according to the before and after*. By movement we do not mean only the physical movement or movement in space, but any movement which implies a development, a growth or an involution, a decay. Then, of course, there come the beginning and the end, birth and death.

The great distinction in matter of time is between the concept of **chronos** and **kairos**. **Chronos** simply marks the succession of happenings according to the measure of the before and after. It is the view of endless repetition or cycles. It has with it the idea that what happens, happens according to a pattern which will repeat itself and is inevitable.

Fate or destiny is associated with this view of time. Life develops in time according to a pre-determined cycle from which no reality can escape. It is a *circular* view of time. It appears easy to understand but, as we are going to see it doesn't explain the whole of reality, especially human freedom and God's initiative.

We have the most striking example of this interpretation of time and life in the Bible, in the book of Qoheleth:

“Vanity of vanities, Qoheleth says. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity! For all his toil under the sun, what does man gain by it? A generation goes, a generation comes, yet the earth stands firm forever. The sun rises, the sun sets; then to its place it speeds and there it rises. Southwards goes the wind, then turns to the north; it turns and turns again; back then to its circling goes the wind. Into the sea all the rivers go, and yet the sea is never filled; and still to their goal the rivers go. All things are wearisome. No man can say that eyes have nor had enough of seeing, ears their fill of hearing. What was will be again; what has been done will be done again; and there is nothing new under the sun. Take anything of which it may be said: ‘Look now, this is new’. Already, long before our time, it existed. Only no memory remains of earlier times, just as in times to come next year itself will not be remembered “ (1:4-11).

Human beings react to this concept of time. Liturgy, and also leisure, take place in the rhythm of time. Rhythmic time is humankind's way of responding to the endless repetition and cyclical meaninglessness of chronological time, which is mere duration.

Kairos is the moment when something new and unexpected happens; something momentous and important which will be pregnant of significance for many. It is a moment of grace, a moment of arrival and a point of departure for other developments.

It is *a sacred time* because it is the place of God's initiative and of human freedom. In the Bible, we have the expression: *the fullness of time*. The fullness of time is caused by the presence of God. In the fullness of time, God sent his only Son to the world, not to condemn the world, but so that the world may be saved through him. It is Jesus who gives the time of his coming its fullness.

The dimensions of time

Time is sacred therefore because it is a **dimension of God's plan of salvation**. In order to accomplish his plan of calling humankind to the sharing of his life, God entered human history through the blessed humanity of Jesus, and through Jesus He shared in our human condition and took active part in the human drama.

The most important moment (**kairos**) is the moment of the Incarnation. It is Eternity entering Time. Thomas S. Elliot, in his famous poems, *The Four Quartets*, calls this moment: INTERSECTION as God's initiative crossed the horizon of man's time.

Time is sacred also because it is a **dimension of Man's development**, especially in his capacity to respond to God's initiative of love and salvation. This capacity is based on human understanding and freedom. These are the traits by which man is recognized as child of God, bearing in himself the image and the likeness of the Creator.

It is because of our freedom and its consequences that the drama of human existence becomes very dramatic indeed. Already in the pagan, pre-Christian world, where **Chronos** is a god who devours his children, there is a sombre, and somehow desperate dramatic character of human life. Man is

subject to the whims of blind gods who are the personification of the forces of nature or the basic instincts of man.

But it is only with the widening of the horizon brought about by God's initiative of salvation and the play of the human freedom that the drama becomes real drama and the human destiny acquires its full dimension. This is the "*Symphony of Human Nature*" as it is sometimes called by the artists and writers who have tried to express this human drama in works of fiction (Cfr. Shusako Endo).

The 3 classic dimensions of time are: the Past, the Present, and the Future. They are the ways the plan of God goes into operation and the ways the human creature has the chance of responding to God. They are the dimensions in which the Mystery of Redemption has taken place and is taking place and will be accomplished.

Of these three dimensions, undoubtedly THE PRESENT is the most important as far as the single human being is concerned. It is also important for the community especially in the Liturgy. In the Liturgy the past is actualized through memory (*anamnesis*) and the future is anticipated through expectation (*expectant prayer*) or prophesy.

The Paschal Mystery is experienced through the Liturgy because Christ himself is present and acts through the Church while the Church acts with him.

The Liturgy shapes the present by actualizing the past and summoning the future.

While the saving events of Christ's Incarnation, obedient life, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension happened once and for all for our salvation, they are also operative for the present Church and are experienced in a unique but not exclusive way through the liturgy.

Another way is the individual contemplation of these mysteries in prayer. By their nature these saving mysteries that happened once in historical time also transcend historical time in the sense that they are able to be experienced here and now. They endure as saving events; they are not repeated or re-enacted in the Liturgy. The Once-and-for-all Events that occurred in saving history are thus regarded as *trans-temporal* or *meta-*

historical in that they are also annually appropriated and fully experienced at particular feasts and seasons such as Easter and Christmas.

Because the salvation experienced in the present Liturgy is of these very same saving mysteries, the term “**actualization of the Paschal Mystery**” is particularly useful to describe what occurs in the liturgy. The theological and spiritual significance of the liturgical commemoration of the Paschal Mystery is that these saving mysteries of Christ offer the faith perspective and the gift of grace through which believers live out, and give meaning to, the fundamental mysteries of human life and salvation, particularly the mysteries of vocation, suffering, and death.

The Acclamations during the Eucharistic Prayer exemplify this:

Dying you destroyed our death,

Rising you restored our life.

Lord Jesus, come in glory.

In the same way, the Preface IV for Sundays in the Ordinary Time:

By his birth we are reborn;

In his suffering we are freed from sin;

By his rising from the dead we rise to everlasting life;

In his return to you in glory we enter into your heavenly kingdom.

This understanding of memorial establishes that the liturgy concerns our experience and continual appropriation of Christ’s dying and rising.

The fullness of time

It is time being assumed by God who is eternity. So, according to the Christian view of time, *there are no cycles, there is no re-incarnation, but time flowing from God and going back to God.* Actually, it is the creatures that flow from God and go back to God. Time is like the **stage** on which this movement takes place; on which this drama develops.

Time is of fundamental importance in the Christian view. The centre of time is the time of the Incarnation. Christ is the Alpha and Omega. Christ is the Lord of History. The mystery of time therefore comprises the mission of the Word and the Mission of the Holy Spirit.

The Mission of the Holy Spirit is larger than the Mission of the historical Christ which continues in the Mission of the Church, but not larger of the Mission of the Risen Christ. The Risen Christ is beyond history and he is the Lord who comes in the last day. It is the Risen Christ who gives the Spirit for the coming of the kingdom. He gives his Spirit in the Church and beyond the boundaries of the Church.

Christ is the same yesterday today and forever (*Hebrews 13:8*).

The trans-temporal dimension of the Risen Christ is described in the New Testament: e.g. The Incarnation of the Word in John; The Cosmic Christ in Paul (*Colossians 1: 15-20*).

Christ is the fulfilment of the yearnings of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definite completion.

By his Incarnation, Christ has united himself, as it were, with every human being who comes into the world. Christ reveals God's plan for all creation and especially for man. He fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.

Christ is also the revelation of God to mankind, the triune God who is Passion for man.

So, the centre of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, the object of the celebration, is Jesus Christ and the purpose of the celebration is the glory of the Trinity.

2.

Praying the “Sentiment of Time” (the “Sense of Time”)

- 1. Meditation on the transient nature of all created realities.*

It is a common experience to reflect on the transient nature of all created realities in connection with the passing of time. One of the best examples in the Bible is Psalm 90:

“You can turn men back into dust
by saying: ‘Back to what you were, you sons of man!’

To you, a thousand years are a single day,
a yesterday now over, an hour of the night.

You brush men away like a waking dream,

they are like grass

sprouting and flowering in the morning,

withered and dry before dark ...

our lives are over in a breath:

our life lasts for seventy years,

eighty with good health...

Teach us to count how few days we have

and so gain wisdom of heart.

Another example is the poetical description of old age in the book of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), 11:7-10; 12:1-8:

“Light is sweet; at the sight of the sun the eyes are glad. However great the number of the years a man may live, let him enjoy them all, and yet remember that dark days will be many. All that is to come is vanity.

Rejoice in your youth, you who are young;

let your heart give you joy in your young days.

Follow the promptings of your heart

and the desires of your eyes.

But this you must know: for all these things God will bring you to judgement.

Cast worry from your heart,
shield your flesh from pain.

Yet youth, the age of dark hair, is vanity. And remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before evil days come and the years approach when you say: 'These give me no pleasure', before sun and light and moon and stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;

the day when those who keep the house tremble
and strong men are bowed;
when the women grind no longer at the mill,
because day is darkening at the windows
and the street doors are shut;
when the sound of the mill is faint,
when the voice of the bird is silenced,
and song notes are stilled,
when to go uphill is an ordeal
and a walk is something to dread.

Yet the almond tree is in flower,
the grasshopper is heavy with food
and the caper bush bears its fruit'

while man goes to his everlasting home. And the mourners are already walking to and fro in the street

before the silver cord has snapped,
or the golden lamp been broken,

or the pitcher shattered at the spring,
or the pulley cracked at the well,

or before the dust return to the earth as it once came from it, and the breath goes to God who gave it.

Vanity of vanities, Qoheleth says. All is vanity."

"The book of Qoheleth ends as it began but has covered much ground in between. It has taught men his wretchedness but also his greatness by

showing that this world is not worthy of him. It incites the reader to disinterested religion and to that kind of prayer in which a creature, aware of its nothingness, adores the mystery of God” (JB commentary).

2. Prayer for an attitude of detachment:

the meditation on the transient nature of all created realities, and the strong feeling of the caducity of things should favour in us a sense of detachment and inner freedom from clinging in an inordinate way to any creature. This detachment becomes then love for a simple lifestyle. We have many instances in the Bible of this sense of detachment, especially in the New Testament:

1 Corinthians 7:29-31: “Brothers, this is what I mean: our time is growing short. Those who have wives should live as they had none, and those who mourn should live as though they had nothing to mourn for; those who are enjoying life should live as though there were nothing to laugh about; those whose life is buying things should live as though they had nothing of their own; and those who have to deal with the world should not become engrossed in it. I say this because the world as we know it is passing away”.

1 Timothy 6:7-10: “We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it; but as long as we have food and clothing, let us be content with that. People who long to be rich are prey to temptation; they get trapped into all sorts of foolish and dangerous ambitions which eventually plunge them into ruin and destruction. The love of money is the root of all evils and there are some who, pursuing it, have wandered away from the faith, and so given their souls any number of fatal wounds:.

Philippians 4:10-15: “It is a great joy to me, in the Lord, that at last you have shown some concern for me again; though of course you were concerned before, and only lacked an opportunity. I am not talking about shortage of money; I have learned to manage on whatever I have. I know how to be poor and I know how to be rich too. I have been through my initiation and now I am ready for anything anywhere, full stomach or empty stomach, poverty or plenty. There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength”.

3. *Prayer of Thanksgiving* for the gifts received and *Prayer of Repentance* for the lost opportunities. Time is the basic gift which is the same as life. Life is time. Time is given to us in order to live and love; in order to welcome Christ in our life and struggle to become like him. If we do not do that, we waste our time and miss the opportunity which is within the gift of time. Time is a gift and the gift within the gift is opportunity.

4. *Prayer of surrender* in God's hands for the future which is coming; and *Invocation* to the Spirit of the Risen Christ to bring into unity the dimensions of time in the **sacrament of the present moment**.

Here and now is the Intersection between time and Eternity; it is in the present time that the Divine breaks into time, when we meet God's initiative and it becomes a Call for us. This takes place in PRAYER. There we have two movements: an effort to look inside (*Spiritual Life*) and an effort to look beyond (*to transcend, to look at Eternal Life*, at the reality of God, at the reality of Christ's Divinity, at Jesus risen from the dead, at Mama Mary and the Saints in Heaven, our homeland...).

3.

We shall consider three texts which express in a very profound manner, this dimension of surrendering to the present and to the depth of God's Presence in the call to love, here and now:

I.

"My end is my beginning" (From: *Four Quarters* by T.S. Eliot (1988-1965):

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,

taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph. And any action
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.
We die with the dying:
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them.

The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
Are of equal duration. A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.

With the Drawing of this Love and the voice of this
Calling

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick, now, here, now, always--
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)

And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

Notes:

1. Julian of Norwich, famous woman mystic of the English tradition (XV century), is the author of the phrase: "All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well".
2. Intersection: it is the breaking into time of the Divine with Christ's Incarnation. It is the revelation of the Love of God which become a Call and happens every moment, in the present instant.
3. In the poem, we find *images of childhood*: they have now become symbols:
 - the *rose* and the *yew-tree* are the two aspects of life: beauty, delicacy; strength, pain, roughness;
 - the *river*, the *tide* are symbol of the passing time and the *waterfall* is the interruption, the intersection.
 - the children in the apple tree are the symbol of humanity in its basic instinct and drive for happiness.

II.

"But for those who love time is eternity":
a song by Fr. John Kavanaugh sj:

Time is too slow for those who wait,
Time is too fast for those who fear.
Time is too long for those who mourn,
Time is too short for those who rejoice.
But for those who love, time is eternity.

*All things have their time,
and all things pass away.
O Lord, I have loved your Life and your World.*

A time to be born and a time to die;
A time to kill and a time to give life;
A time to plant and a time to pluck off the fruit.
A time to destroy and a time to build.
But for those who love, time is eternity.

A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to scatter and a time to gather;
A time to dance and a time to mourn;

A time to embrace and a time to be apart.
But for those who love, time is eternity.

*All things have their time, and all things pass away.
O Lord, I have loved your Life and your World*

III.

“Where prayer has been valid”: from *Four Quartets* again:

If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
And what the dead had no speech for, when living.

They can tell you, being dead: the communication of the dead
Is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.
Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

4. Looking into the Future.

“The Church cannot prepare for the new millennium in any other way than in the Holy Spirit. What was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of time can only through the Spirit’s power now emerge from the memory of the Church. The Spirit in fact makes present in the Church of every time and place the unique revelation brought by Christ to Humanity, making it alive and active in the soul of each individual: “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (*John 14:26*).

In our own day too, the Spirit is the principal agent of the new evangelization... the One who builds the kingdom of God within the course of history and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, stirring people’s hearts and quickening in our world the seeds of the true salvation which will

come at the end of time... The attitude of hope encourages the Christian not to lose sight of the final goal which gives meaning and value to life and offers solid and profound reasons for a daily commitment to transform reality in order to make it correspond to God's plan " (John Paul II, TMA, n. 44-45-46).

Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ

December 2000

THE PILGRIMAGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Millennium and Pilgrimage
 - The Pilgrimage: sign of the Jubilee
 - Famous targets of pilgrimage in ancient times
 - The meaning of pilgrimage in the context of the Jubilee
 - The pilgrimage of the individual and of the community

2. Our life is a pilgrimage (Theology)
 - In the Old Testament
 - In the New Testament
 - In the Church
 - Conclusion

3. The Spirituality of Pilgrimage (Songs of Ascent)
 - Feelings and attitudes of the pilgrim
 - Fruits of the Spirituality of the pilgrim

YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER
JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME;
YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER,
THE LORD IS THE SAME.

*Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ,
Calamba, September 21, 2000*

MILLENNIUM AND PILGRIMAGE

Introduction: The meaning of the Great Jubilee Pilgrimage

1. The Pilgrimage: sign of the Jubilee

“The institution of the Jubilee has been enriched throughout the centuries by different signs which attest the faith of the Christian people and, at the same time, help their devotion. Among those signs, *the pilgrimage* has pride of place” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, n.7).

We can therefore say that the Pilgrimage traditionally is a sign of the Jubilee. But in reality, the pilgrimage came into existence a thousand years before the Jubilee. The first Jubilee took place in the year 1300 A. D. and it was the initiative of Pope Boniface VIII, whereas the first documentation about pilgrimages to the Holy Land is of the IV Century and it belongs to a woman.

We have a book by the title **Peregrinatio** (Pilgrimage) written by a woman pilgrim, **Egeria**; the book has incalculable value because it describes for the first time the places of Jesus’ life and death in the Holy Land as they appeared at that time.

Egeria was following the example of another famous woman, Helena, the mother of emperor Constantine, who first showed interest in the places of Christ’s life and death. She is the one who discovered the relic of the Cross of Jesus.

2. Famous targets of pilgrimage in the ancient times

The custom to go in pilgrimage to the tomb of the martyrs is testified by the amazing story of the discovery of the tomb of St. Peter in Rome in the fifties by the archeologist Margarita Guarducci. Excavations were allowed by Pope Pius XII under the main altar of St. Peter’s basilica and the remains of a I century pagan cemetery were found and, in a diagonally different position, a Christian tomb which contained the bones of an adult male ... Those bones are now in the urn on the small altar dedicated to St. Peter, placed under the main altar of the St. Peter’s basilica.

When the second and present basilica was built after 1200 years by Michelangelo, the position of the main altar was religiously respected even though by then the memory of the actual tomb of the Prince of apostles was lost... What a fascinating story !

So, to add to Rome and Jerusalem, other targets of pilgrimage, during the ancient times, were Canterbury in England, the place of the martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket; Loreto where the “Santa Casa” was believed to have been brought by the angels and Lucca where the relic of the Holy Face (the “Santo Volto” of Veronica) is kept and more than anywhere else Compostela in Spain where the body of the apostle St. James is believed to be buried. Other places of pilgrimage became famous and frequented by the Christian people elsewhere like Guadalupe in Mexico (El Tepeyac) and Antipolo in the Philippines (our Lady of Peace and Bon Voyage).

3. The meaning of pilgrimage in the context of the Jubilee

With the institution of the Jubilee the pilgrimage assumes even more all its symbolic meaning of a **Journey of conversion**: to come out, come away from sin and start a journey towards God. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem had become impossible because of the presence of the Muslims in the Holy Land. Rome as a consequence becomes the target of the pilgrims: **i Romei**.

“Come, obedient sons and daughters of the Catholic Church, come, climb to the place that the Lord has chosen, go up to the spiritual mountain of the Lord, the heavenly Jerusalem. This is that happy city whose faith, praised by the apostle Paul, is announced in the whole world, this is the city in which St. Peter and Paul taught up to the point of giving their life in martyrdom; this is the city which has become, thanks to the presence of the Holy See of Peter, the centre of the whole world, mother of all the believers and head of all the Churches.

Here is the rock of faith, here the source of the priestly unity, here the unchangeable doctrine, and here the treasure of all the indulgences which are made available by the Holy Father who is their keeper and dispenser, in a special way during the time of the Jubilee” (Pope Clement VIII, *Annus Domini Placabilis*, 1599).

In reality, the pilgrimage is a powerful symbol of the itinerant condition of our human existence in this world. Life is a journey from birth to death: HOMO VIATOR. And since our life comes from God and tends towards God, then our journey of life becomes a sacred journey. A PILGRIMAGE.

We are on a journey towards our homeland: “**Non habemus hic manentem civitatem... Civitas nostra in coelis est**” (*Hebrews* 13:14). Conquently, here, in this world, we are in exile and we are on a journey towards our home which is the Lord:

“We are always full of confidence, then, when we remember that to live in the body means to be exiled from the Lord, going as we do by faith and not by sight – we are full of confidence, I say, and actually want to be exiled from the body and make our home with the Lord” (2 *Corinthians* 5:6-7).

4. The Pilgrimage of the individual and of the community

The existential pilgrimage becomes the journey of imitation of Christ who went up to Jerusalem carrying his cross to accomplish the will of the Father, his redemptive mission.

“The whole of the Christian Life is like **a great pilgrimage to the house of the Father**, whose unconditional love for every human creature and in particular for the “prodigal son” we discover anew each day. This pilgrimage takes place in the heart of each person, extends to the believing community and then reaches to the whole of humanity.

The Jubilee, centered on the person of Christ, thus becomes a great act of praise to the Father: ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him’ (*Ephesians* 1:3-4)” (TMA, n. 49).

The Jubilee Pilgrimage is not only the symbol of the individual journey of faith, but also of **the journey of the Christian community**, the Church throughout the centuries. The Pope brings another beautiful image of movement: **the river**.

“The many Jubilee celebrations (27 in all) recall the journey of Christ (with his Church) down the centuries, leading to the Great Jubilee at the end of the second millennium. Seen in this light, the whole of Christian history appears to us as a single river, into which many tributaries pour their waters.

The year 2000 invites us to gather with renewed fidelity and ever deeper communion along the banks of this great river: the river of Revelation, of Christianity and of the Church, a river which flows through human history, starting from the **Event** which took place at Nazareth and then at Bethlehem two thousand years ago. This is truly the “river” which with its “streams”, in the expression of the Psalm, “make glad the city of God” (*Psalms* 46:4)” (TMA n. 25).

This is the theology of the Jubilee Pilgrimage and it calls for a fitting spirituality; The pilgrimage must be the sign of **an interior journey of faith into ourselves and towards God by means of prayer and penance**. The

signs of this are the practices of the Jubilee: the reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Communion, taking part in a liturgical celebration, adoration, meditation, prayer for the Pope (*Credo and Our Father*) and the pilgrimage.

There are 4 targets of sacred journey nowadays: The Holy Land, Rome and the visit to the 4 major basilicas; the visit to the cathedral of our home diocese (or our parish church) and the visit and assistance to the poor: **“Christ , present in a pilgrimage towards the poor”**.

OUR LIFE IS A PILGRIMAGE

(Theology of Pilgrimage)

Our life can be compared to a journey towards God. This journey is a sacred journey, a **pilgrimage** (*PEREGRINATIO*).

I. In the Old Testament:

1. This idea of the journey, the way, comes to us from the religious experience of the people of Israel, a nomadic people: Cf. *Deuteronomy* 30:15-20: to know the way, the right way, the right direction is very important for an itinerant creature:

the two Ways:

“See, today I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster. If you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God that I enjoin on you today, if you love Yahweh your God and follow his ways, if you keep his commandments, his laws, customs, you will live and increase, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to make your own. But if your heart strays, if you refuse to listen, if you let yourself be drawn into worshipping other gods and serving them, I tell you today, you will most certainly perish; you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. **I call heaven and earth to witness** against you today: I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Chose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, clinging to him; for in this your life consists, and on this

depends your long staying in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob he would give them”.

2. Israel is not content with general moral teaching: their religious experience leads them further. Abraham is called by God **to set out on a way, on a journey**, thus to start a vast religious experience, an adventure... The starting point is faith, the obedience of faith. The initiative, the call belongs to God.

3. The **Exodus** is the outstanding example of this religious adventure: God walks with his people: He opens up a way through the mighty waters, through the desert. God opens up a way for the people through death: **the Passover**. God is seen as the Shepherd of the people: *Psalm 23*

4. The memory of the Exodus, recalled each year during the feast of the Passover, impressed itself deeply into the mind of the people: God is present among the people and his presence makes the people pass from death to life, reach their destination.

The material journey of Exodus becomes a spiritual journey; the historical journey of the Israelites becomes an existential journey, a personal journey.

It is in the Liturgy that the individual and the community interiorize the historical journey: **the pilgrimage to Jerusalem** makes the experience of Exodus become present day reality: in prayer, in order to renew the fruits of salvation and liberation in the soul, at any given stage of one's journey.

There is a group of Psalms which express the feelings of the faithful in the yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the great feasts of the community in which Exodus and the Covenant with God are renewed and revived: **the Songs of Ascent: 120 – 134.**

II The New Testament:

1. The climax of the journey of humanity towards God is realized in the **Blessed Person of Jesus**, his Exodus and Passover in the Paschal Mystery: in Him we all come out of slavery and exile. It is no longer an affair concerning the Chosen People; but He is **the Son of Man**: in his destiny he represents the whole of humankind. In his Passover, we are all set in motion to pass from death to life, from sin to grace.

John 3:16-17 “Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved”.

Jesus’ Journey: *John 16:28* “**As I came from the Father and have come into the world, so I am leaving the world and going to the Father**”. Cf. *Philippians 2:6-11*.

2. If the whole life of Jesus can be seen as the climax of the journey of humanity towards God, in the life of Jesus, there is a moment in which the spirit of the Pilgrimage-**Peregrinatio**- appears more emphasized and stressed: **his journey towards Jerusalem** in order to die for us.

It is the evangelist Luke who describes in a unified way the journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem and the significance of it for Jesus’ Mission:

***Luke 9:51* “Now, as the time drew near for him to be taken up to heaven, he resolutely took the road for Jerusalem...”**

- *as the time drew near*: or as the days were on the point of been

accomplished. The plan of God is behind this crucial moment in Jesus’ life. On the Cross Jesus will cry: “Everything has been accomplished”.

- *for him to be taken up (to heaven)*: the expression: taken up or lifted

up is parallel to the other we find in verse 31 (the Transfiguration): The Exodus or the Passage, Passover (what Jesus was discussing with Moses and Elijah on the Holy Mountain).

It reminds us of “the lifting up” of John. The 2 terms express the 2 sides of the same reality: Jesus’ Baptism; Jesus’ cup, Exodus, Passage: last death; taken up, lifted up: his resurrection. It is the heart of the journey so that what comes before is a preparation and what comes afterwards is a perfecting or a development of the essential core the Paschal Mystery.

- *He resolutely took the road to Jerusalem: literally: he hardened his face to*

walk towards Jerusalem. It means **determination**: it is the attitude of the prophet and the servant who goes along the way of obedience to God's plan without looking back. This hardness of Jesus is the counterpart, the opposite of the hardness of heart of disobedience and flight, escape: e.g. Adam

- *Towards Jerusalem: there is where the prophet has to die; the place where*

the plan of God has to be accomplished, where all the peoples will come in pilgrimage to be drawn into unity.

III The Church:

1. **Jesus' Exodus becomes our Exodus.** The reflection and meditation of the early Church, the Pilgrim Community, is centered on the Paschal Mystery. In the Acts of the Apostles, Christianity is first called simply **The Way**. The Way is no longer the Law, but a Person, Jesus, who has embodied in his destiny, our destiny:

In Him occurs the Passover and the Exodus of the Christians:

- *One must walk (Colossians 2:6):*

“You must live your whole life according to the Christ you have received: Jesus, the Lord; you must be rooted in Him and built on Him and held firm by the faith you have been taught, and full of thanksgiving”.

- *Following the way of love (Ephesians 5:2)*

“Try then to imitate God, as children of His that He loves, and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving Himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God”.

- *The way of Agape, Charity, Love (1 Corinthians 12:31)*

“Be ambitious for the higher gifts. And I'm going to show you a way that is better than any other ...”.

2. But it is *the letter to the Hebrews* that we find the **most profound theological reflections about the Way:**

a- 10:19-20

“In other words, brothers and sisters, through the blood of Jesus, we have the right to enter the sanctuary, by a new way he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is, his body” (Cf. *John* 14: I AM THE WAY).

b- 12:1-4

“With so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then, should throw off everything that hinders us, especially sin that clings so easily, and keep running steadily in the race we have started. Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, he endured the cross, disregarding the shameful of it, and from now on has taken his place at the right of God’s throne. Think of the way he stood such opposition from sinners and then you will not give up for want of courage. In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of death”.

- *Who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection*: “To live in faith and by faith means to give way to Christ so that He may express Himself and grow in our life” (*Romano Guardini*).
- *Archegos*: the trail blazer, the pioneer and *Teleyotes*: the one who completes, the perfecter. The whole chapter 12 of the *letter to the Hebrews* is up to the point.

Conclusion:

The people of God is a priestly people who follow Jesus on Christ’s trail: **Egredere**: “Go out & Set out” (*Genesis* 12:1): God’s command to Abraham befits God’s People in their journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem.

Nomadic people, people always on a journey, the new Israel, the Church, accept to make of their lives a pilgrimage with all the risks that it entails, keeping their eyes on and entrusting themselves to the infallible the presence of the One who opens the way and assists us to the end: **the trail-blazer**. The target, the Promised Land, is the heavenly Jerusalem.

This immense crowd of people on a journey is a **procession** which climbs towards the temple: **Peregrinatio**. It is a sacred march, a liturgy. They give to God a worship in spirit and in truth. It is a priestly people.

and the image of the Pilgrim speaks to our existential condition, helping us to reflect about it and to live it out more consciously, especially during the Lent period.

The Pilgrim is on a journey towards the temple of God, the holy city of Jerusalem, in order to see the Face of the Lord, and to celebrate his mighty works of liberation and redemption.

The Psalms of Ascent give us:

I. the feelings and attitudes of the Pilgrim as well as the conditions required for a fruitful journey. It is good to go through these feelings together, as they are beautifully expressed by the eternal words of the Psalms, to express in prayers our condition of pilgrims:

1.Desire and longing for the Lord and his temple:

* *Psalm* 84:1-2: “How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, God of hosts. My soul is longing and yearning ..”

* *Psalm* 122:1-2 “I rejoiced when I heard them say: Let us go to God’s house. And now our feet are standing within your gates, o Jerusalem”.

The desire, the longing for God and His presence in our life is at the heart of the desire for his temple; the presence of God is held in faith and it becomes

2.Unshakable trust in the Lord:

* *Psalm* 123:1-2: “To you have I lifted up my eyes, you who dwell in the heavens; my eyes like the eyes of slaves on the hand of their Lords. Like the eyes of a servant on the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are on the Lord our God till He shows us his mercy”.

* *Psalm* 125:1 “Those who put their trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, that cannot be shaken, that stands for ever”.

* *Psalm* 127:1-2 “If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor ... In vain is your earlier rising, your going later to rest, you who toil for the bread you eat, when he pours gifts on his beloved while they slumber ...”

The longing and the yearning for God’s temple, for God’s vision, give

3. courage in the midst of difficulties, like the pilgrim who passes through difficult places, longing for the moment of arrival:

* *Psalm* 84:6-7 “As they go through the bitter valley, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rain covers it with blessings; they walk with ever growing strength, they will see the God of gods in Zion”.

* *Psalm* 124: “If the Lord had not been on our side ... when men rose against us, ... then would have swept the raging water ... Our life like a bird has escaped ...”

* *Psalm* 126: “When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage, it seemed like a dream ... Those who are sowing in tears, will sing when they reap. They go out, they go out full of tears, carrying seed for the sowing; they come back, they come back full of songs, carrying their sheaves”.

But the hardest experience of the pilgrim is to

4.fall into sin: that is really the bitter valley where even hope seems to be absent; where only God’s pardon can rescue us. It is the **ditch:**

De Profundis: Request for Pardon and Mercy:

* *Psalm* 130: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice ... My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his word. My soul is longing for the Lord more than watchman for daybreak ... Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption”.

Marvelous cry from the heart and piece of religious poetry which describes the human condition in its depths and, at the same time, is full of peace in the expectation of God’s mercy.

Another feeling of the pilgrim is

5.the joy and serenity in the experience of the presence of God, even if this presence is held in faith;

* *Psalm* 131: “O Lord God, my heart is not proud nor haughty my eyes; I have not gone after things too great nor marvels beyond me. Truly I have set my soul in silence and peace. As a child has rest in its mother’s arms, even so my soul. O Israel, hope in the Lord, both now and for ever”.

This little psalm is the climax of the *Songs of Ascent*; because the virtue which befits the pilgrim more than any other is the virtue of hope. This abiding in the sure hope in God’s love and mercy, in God’s presence in our life, goes hand in hand with

6.the experience of brotherhood: we are not alone in our journey:

* *Psalm 133*: “How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live in unity. It is like precious oil upon the head running down upon the beard, running down upon Aaron’s beard, upon the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the heights of Zion. For there the Lord gives his blessings, life forever”.

Conclusion: But the psalm which expresses and sums up the feelings of the pilgrim more than any other is *Psalm 23*: “The Lord is my shepherd.

Who are the true pilgrims? They are those who fulfill the conditions for climbing the mountain of the Lord:

Psalm 24: 3-6: “Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? The man with clean hands and a pure heart, who desires not worthless things, who has not sworn so as to deceive his neighbor... Such are the men who seek him, seek the face of the God of Jacob”.

II. Fruits of the Spirituality of the Pilgrim:

1. The pilgrim knows where he is going:

The pilgrimage calls me to a deeper sense of my journey of faith and my call to holiness. I also am a pilgrim: my life enfolds inexorably, day after day, month after month, year after year. Where am I going? Where am I heading to? Have I kept my sense of direction? Does the call to holiness, to the perfection of love, has still a meaning for me?

Do the steps in the journey of perfection (purification, illumination, union) have an attraction for me? “*Fecisti nos, Domine, ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*”. Do the three degrees of humility described by St. Ignatius still inspire me?

2. The pilgrim walks with the Lord.

How do I live the PRESENCE OF GOD in my daily life. “If the Lord does not build the house... “The Lord is my Shepherd”...Or, on the contrary, do I live and work as if I had here my permanent abode; if everything depended on me, on my strength, my money, my qualities, my efforts...

3. The pilgrim travels light.

How is my sense of detachment? Am I free to follow the will of God manifested in obedience, the demands of apostolate and service; or do I cling

WITNESS & MARTYRDOM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

1. The witness of God in the Old Testament
2. The witness of Jesus
3. “You shall be my witnesses”
4. The witness of the Apostles
5. The witness of the other Christians

The witness of Martyrdom

Present day relevance of witness

Theology of Martyrdom

1. The importance of Martyrdom in Formation
2. Martyrdom is the horizon of Christian life
3. Mary’s bloodless martyrdom and us
4. The Eucharist and Martyrdom

Conclusion

“According to Christ’s teaching, the state of persecution is the normal state for the Church in the world, and martyrdom for Christians is their normal situation. Not in the sense that the Church ought to be continuously and everywhere persecuted; but if the Church is persecuted for some time and in certain places, she should immediately remember that she is sharing a grace, a blessing which Christ promised her: “I told you these things so that, when their hour will come, you may remember that I told you”. These words cannot be overcome by any evolution of the world. And not in the sense that every single Christian ought to undergo a bloody martyrdom, but in the sense that he/she ought to consider the case that presents itself as the external manifestation of an inner reality which he/she is already living. Martyrdom is the horizon of Christian life in a different way from how it was for the Jewish faith. In the latter in fact it was the extreme human possibility, for the single faithful, of witnessing one’s faith in God; what stands out is the bravery for the sake of one’s faith: they are heroes who are introduced to the whole people, especially to the youth. Such a heroic character is missing in the New Testament because it is not us, human beings, who first aim at the extreme target, but we come from there where Jesus Christ first and definitely dwelt.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar)

By

Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ

2020

Introduction

In the NT Greek the term is **martyr** :

witness, to witness, to testify, to attest the reality of an event or a statement by giving to the affirmation of it all the evidence and with solemnity which the circumstances require.

Strictly speaking: witness is one who has observed an event and can give an account of it by way of proof; more broadly: a witness to the truth: a person who knows something to be true, who proclaims the truth, who stands for his/her convictions.

It is a term born in the context of a trial or in a legal action setting.

The witness of a man is serious; false witness is a grave sin; it is condemned (Cf. The 8th commandment). God is the guarantor of the witness. The witness in the court of law swears by God to tell the truth ...

In more general sense, one can attest the reality of something in different ways: by word or actions, by the behavior or even by silence.... In the religious field in particular, the supreme form of witness to God's truth is to give one's life, to accept the loss of it, violently, to be martyrs.

I. *The witness of God (in the OT)*

Beyond the witness of men there is the witness of God which no one can contradict. He is the guarantor of all our human contracts (like those concerning marriage or property ...), the avenger against false witness.

God is especially the guarantor of the Covenant (divine contract) by giving the commandments: they are preceded by God's *solemn witness*: "I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (*Exodus* 20:1); Cf. all the chapters 19-20 and *Deuteronomy* 5:1-22.

The commitment of Israel to God is attested by object/signs which bear witness against the people in case of infidelity: *The tablets of witness*, in which the commandments were carved, *the ark of witness* where the tablets were kept and the *tent of witness* in which the ark was housed....

Even heaven and earth can be called as witnesses: Cf. *Deuteronomy* 30:19 (the whole passage: 15-20):

"See. Today I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster. If you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God that I enjoin on you today, if you love Yahweh your God and follow

his ways, if you keep his commandments, his laws, his customs, you will live and increase, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to make your own. But if your heart strays, if you refuse to listen, if you let yourself be drawn into worshipping other gods and serving them, I tell you today, you will most certainly perish; you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today: I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Chose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, clinging to him; for in this your life consists, and on this depends your long staying in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob he would give them”.

God gives the task or mission to be witnesses to the Prophets: it is more often an accusing witness against the unfaithfulness of the people (Cf. *Amos*); but also they are witnesses of Yahweh’s love for the people of Israel: it is in the Prophets (*Hosea, Isaiah, etc....*) that we find the most beautiful and extraordinary expressions of love: e.g. *Isaiah* 43:1-7.

II. *The witness of Jesus according to John’s Gospel*

The concept of WITNESS is very much developed in the NT, especially in the writings of the evangelist John, in Acts and in St. Paul.

Jesus is the **faithful witness** (*Revelation* 1:5) who has come into the world to bear witness to the truth (*John* 18:37): and the truth is the salvific will of God.

1. JESUS’ SUPREME WITNESS: This is the affirmation that Jesus gives in front of Pontius Pilate: it is the **supreme witness**. In the Gospel of John, the episode of Jesus in front of Pontius Pilate is developed very much and with a dramatic flair. The scenes are somehow divided by the movements of the procurator who goes out to see the crowds and comes in again to continue the interrogation of Jesus.

There are two moments of great dramatic importance:

- the **2nd scene** where Jesus proclaims himself king and yet his kinship is of an unusual character.

“So, you are a king then?” said Pilate. “It is you who said it” answered Jesus. **“Yes, I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth** and those who are on the side of the truth listen to my voice” (*John* 18:37).

- **the last (7th) scene** where Jesus is brought out in front of the crowd, seated on

the seat of judgment and introduced to the people as their king. It was the sixth hour when the paschal lamb was sacrificed. The solemnity of the scene is marked by the accuracy of the indications of time and place:

Pilate had Jesus brought out, and seated him in the chair of judgment at a place called the Pavement, in Hebrew Gabbatha. It was the Day of Preparation, about the sixth hour. 'Here is your king' said Pilate to the Jews. 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him'." (John, 19:13-15, New Jerusalem Bible). "

John means to tell us that precisely at this time the great mystery is been accomplished, THE TRUTH, behind the signs being performed in the temple, is being realized. Jesus is king, he is seated on the seat of judgment. He is judging humanity. We are in the presence of the judicial and royal power that belong to Christ as Son of Man: and this is the glory of Christ in the humiliation of his passion and death. Jesus manifests, witnesses the love of the Father in so unheard a way (paradox) as to become, by force of his love, King and Messiah and therefore source of salvation for humanity, whether he is accepted or rejected.

We have here the messianic enthronement of Jesus in the moment in which he accomplishes his fundamental mission of manifesting to men, by the complete and utter donation of himself, the love of the Father. John, presenting in his gospel the dramatic trial between Light and Darkness with the victory of Light, shows us that the climax where darkness seems to triumph, the darkest hour of humanity, is in this moment and not later, already in this very moment when humanity endeavors to crush him, Christ really reigns and triumphs. The scene before Pilate is a sign where the historian reads death, but the believer reads there the fulfillment of the true mission of Jesus, his triumph: the TRUTH (*De La Potterie*).

St. Paul takes up the topic of **Jesus' great testimony** in two beautiful passages of the first letter to Timothy:

1 Timothy 2:6 "God wants everyone to be saved and reach the full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God and one Mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself as a ransom for them all. **He is the evidence of this**, sent at the appointed time, and I have been named a herald and apostle of it and – I'm telling the truth and no lie – a teacher of the faith and truth to the pagans".

1 Timothy 6:13 "Fight the good fight of the faith and win for yourself the eternal life to which you were called when you made your profession and spoke up for the truth in front of many witnesses. Now, before God, the source of all life and **before Jesus Christ, who spoke up as a**

witness for the truth in front of Pontius Pilate, I put to you the duty of doing all that you have been told...”

Jesus’ witness or testimony elicit the one of the Christian leaders, the Apostles. This passage (*1 Timothy* 6:11-16) is reach of spiritual consequences.

2. CONTENT AND VALIDATION OF JESUS’ WITNESS, according to John’s Gospel:

- Jesus bears witness to what he has seen and heard in the presence of the Father;

- Jesus bears witness about himself: the famous **self-definitions**: Cf. 8,12 “I am the Light of the world ...”, etc...

- Jesus’ witness is valid because it is based on the evidence of other witnesses: John the Baptist (*Ecce Agnus Dei*); the works accomplished by Jesus at the Father’s command; The Scriptures (*Moses, Abraham*); The final witness is the Spirit: in Him Christ is victorious over death and fills the whole world. The Spirit which is given to us gives witness to Jesus (“When the Advocate comes... he will be my witness. And you too will be witnesses because you have been with me from the outset” *John* 15:26).

The testimony of the Father is Jesus’ resurrection:

“We accept the testimony of human witnesses, but God’s testimony is much greater, and this is God’s testimony, given as evidence for his Son. Everybody who believes in the Son of God has his testimony inside him; and anyone who will not believe God is making God out to be a liar, because he has not trusted the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son; anyone who has the Son has life, anyone who does not have the Son does not have life” (1 John, 5:9-12)

III. “YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES”

The witness of the NT must take a concrete form: the preaching of the Gospel: *Matthew* 24:14 “This Good News of the kingdom will be proclaimed to the whole world as a witness to all nations and then the end will come”.

The great commission : *Matthew* 28:19-20 “Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I give you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time”.

“There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed” (EN n.32).

1. *The witness of the Apostles*

The Apostles are first of all witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection and then of the whole life of Jesus (Acts 1:21-22 Matthias’s qualifications). They are *first hand witnesses* who have seen and heard (*eye witnesses*), but inspired by the Spirit (“When the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth” (John 16:13)).

The witness belongs to the mystery which the event conceals: the mystery of the Word of Life come in the flesh. The apostles are witnesses who possess in themselves the testimony of Jesus. Faith is born in the acceptance of their witness.

The *kerigma*:

“Now, I and those with me, can witness to everything he did throughout the countryside of Judea and in Jerusalem itself: and also to the fact that they killed him by hanging him on a tree yet three days afterwards God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people, but only by certain witnesses God had chosen beforehand. Now we are those witnesses, we have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead-and has ordered us to proclaim this to his people and to tell them that God has appointed him to judge everyone, alive or dead. It is to him that all the prophets bear witness: that all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name” (*Acts*, 10:39-43).

“We saw it and we are giving our testimony” (*1 John* 1:1-4; cf. *John* 19:35; 21:24...). The evangelist John insists very much on the experience of the senses: “We have heard, we have seen we have watched, we have touched...”.

The witness of the resurrection is very strong in St. Paul also:

“If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself cannot have been raised, and if Christ has not been raised than our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless; indeed we shown up as witnesses who have committed perjury before God, because we swore in evidence before God that he had raised Christ to life. For, if the dead are not raised, and if Christ had not been raised, you are still in your sins...” (*1 Corinthians*. 15:13-17).

The apostles’ witness is threefold:

1. *The witness of the word*: they started their ministry in an atmosphere of contradiction; they had to rehabilitate Jesus in front of the Jewish public opinion. The law wanted the witness of more than one person, so it is that, when Peter speaks, he always says WE.

They are ministers of the Word. They speak with the power of the Holy Spirit. They speak with boldness, bringing their own testimony and that of the Holy Scriptures as Jesus had taught them.

2. *The witness of signs and wonders*, also with the power of the Spirit.
3. *The witness of suffering and death*: the death: the suffering of Jesus they saw as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies and their own suffering as the fulfillment of the Beatitudes: “And so they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honor of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name” (Acts 5:41).

It was the Holy Spirit who had turned timid men into heroes who were able to tread in the footprints of the Servant of Yahweh. The apostles are the witnesses par excellence because of the direct experience **the Crucified and Risen Christ**. **This is the charism of apostolate proper, that cannot be passed on.**

2. *The witness of all the other Christians*

Their witness is based, not on a direct, historical experience of the crucified and risen Lord, but on the faith in the word of the Apostles (the Church) and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The experience of Pentecost repeats itself e.g. after Peter and John’s release from Sanhedrin (*Acts* 4:31); at Cornelius’ conversion (*Acts* 10:44), etc... and in different forms in every genuine adhesion of faith.

It is the base of the witness of the followers of Jesus; it is the gift of the Holy Spirit for the individual and the community. God’s witness finds a response only in the heart of the believer; only for the believer can it become a source of life.

This gift of the Spirit is manifested in:

- JOY: as a consequence of the acceptance of the message of the Apostles and faith in the resurrection of Christ, as the Apostles themselves experienced at Easter; as consolation for the presence of the risen Christ with his Spirit already in this life and as foretaste of our own resurrection and victory at the second coming of the Lord;

- LOVE: energetic, brotherly love like that of the early Christians: “The community of those who believed were of one heart, and one soul; no one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything that they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32).

These traits are a counter – witness against the sadness and selfishness of a Godless society. The famous French priest, **Abbe’ Pierre, the apostle of the rag-pickers**, testifies to the fact that in the brotherhood of Emmaus the order of the theological virtues is inverted. On their arrival, the *clochards* (homeless) are given every kind of loving service. By degrees, under the rays of a heartfelt love, the ice of the embitterment and cynicism melts. Hope is back gradually in the hearts of these deprived ones... Finally, faith in Christ is kindled in them.

- PERSECUTION: often the witness is not accepted and persecution follows which is the occasion for a more widespread witness: since the beginning, persecution was the occasion for reaching out to other places, a pattern which has repeated itself throughout the history of the Church up to the present time.

Persecution is also the occasion of exercising other gifts of the Spirit: boldness, courage, perseverance, endurance. With the long persecution, the term *martyr* becomes synonym of witness of blood. Martyrdom is the total, absolute witness: a witness to the faith consecrated by the testimony of blood.

3. *The witness of Martyrdom: preliminary remarks*

Chronologically, martyrdom was the first form of witness to be experienced by the early Church. In the early Church, the Church of the age of persecution, the Eucharist was celebrated on the body of the Martyrs; later, on their relics.

It is as if people learned first to die for Christ and then to live for Him (Even in Africa, e.g. in Uganda: the Uganda Martyrs,... Nyadru... In Congo-Zaire: Anwarite... In the Philippines: Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod...). The witness of holiness follows.

In the early teaching of the Fathers, Christ is present in the martyr (*Christus in martyre est* – Tertullian): after all Christ is the first to extend his witness to the shedding of blood. “*Et nos martyrum*

fructus sumus”: there is a fruitfulness, fecundity for the community in martyrdom.

Even in Comboni, the tension to total witness which is martyrdom echoes the theology and spirituality of the cross. The model is the Pierced Heart of the Good Shepherd. “If I had a thousand lives, I’d like to give them all for the salvation of Africa”.

The theme of martyrdom is very much present in the NT, especially in the **book of Revelation**. Martyrdom is witness consecrated by the testimony of blood. It develops in front of opposition and persecution:

- Babylon gluts on the blood of the martyrs: “Babylon the Great, the mother of all the prostitutes and all the filthy practices on the earth. I saw that she was drunk, drunk with the blood of the saints, and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus...” (*Revelation 16:5-6*).

The apparent defeat of the martyrs is in reality a victory: Cf. *Revelation 12:10-12* (After the defeat of the Dragon)

“Victory and power and empire for ever have been won by our God, and all authority for his Christ, now that the persecutor, who accused our brothers day and night before our God, has been brought down. They have triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the witness of their martyrdom, because, even in the face of death, they would not cling to life. Let the heaven rejoice and all that live there...”.

The topic of Martyrdom is treated separately in a reflection where its theology and spirituality are given a proper development.

4. Present day relevance of witness

1. “Today, more than ever, and as in the first centuries of her existence, the Church chiefly needs **witnesses** who, by their whole way of life, make the true countenance of Christ shine out before a world which has grown pagan” (Pius XII, 1947).

2. “Modern man listens more willingly to **witnesses** than to teachers and if it does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Paul VI, EN n. 41, 1975).

3. “The modern apostle too is called to bear **witness** to the Risen Christ to a world which has grown pagan”.

“We too are for the gift of the Spirit without which we can achieve nothing: when we humbly implore it from God, he will open to us the immeasurable depth of Holy Scriptures and will equip us with superhuman power”. (John Paul II).

In RM, 1990, chapter 5: *Paths of Mission*, the first path of evangelization in **witness**. The Pope distinguishes 5 forms of witness:

- *the witness of holiness*: the very life;
- *charity* towards the poor, the weak and the suffering;
- *commitment to peace*, justice, human rights and human promotion;
- *prophetic stand* in the face of injustice, oppression and corruption;
- *The witness of humility*: a humility which allows us to make a personal and community examination of conscience in order to correct in our behavior whatever is contrary to the Gospel and disfigure the face of Christ. The capacity of putting ourselves in question, of on-going formation.

THEOLOGY OF MARTYRDOM

Introduction:

On May 7, 2000, in Rome, there was the commemoration of the Martyrs of the XXth Century. It took place in the Coliseum, a place very meaningful for every Christian because it reminds us of the first Christians who were dragged into the Coliseum to be given as prey to the wild animals, or to be tortured and killed in every possible cruel way.

It was a gesture which was naturally meant to draw a parallel between the first Christian community and the Church of the XX Century and to suggest that even for the era which is coming to an end the Church can be considered the “Church of Martyrs”, as the Pope wrote:

The Church of the first millennium was born of the blood of the Martyrs: ‘*Sanguis martyrum – semen christianorum*’ ... The historical events linked to the figure of Constantine the Great could never have ensured the development of the Church as it occurred during the first millennium if it had not been for *the seed sown by the Martyrs and the heritage of sanctity which marked the first millennium*.

At the end of the second millennium, *the Church has once again become a Church of Martyrs*. The persecution of believers – priests, religious and laity – has caused a great sowing of martyrdom in different

parts of the world. The witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants, as Pope Paul VI pointed out in his Homily for the Canonization of the Martyrs of Uganda. *This witness must not be forgotten.*” (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 1994, n. 37*).

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF MARTYRDOM IN OUR MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE AND FORMATION

The experience of Martyrdom, with or without the shedding of blood, is indicated in our chapter documents as a good, positive sign, present in the experience of the Congregation, especially during the last years and which brings to maturity our missionary vocation as the conscience of a radical commitment to be kept until death. (where this “until death” may mean both the final perseverance or martyrdom).

It is a sign which marks our peculiarity as belonging to an Institute which appears to have been entrusted with the most difficult missions, and those in the most dangerous places, and puts us, COMBONI MISSIONARIES, in line with today’s Church which is “the Church of Martyrs”. Only in the missionary field, without considering other areas or situations, according to Card. Tomko of Propaganda Fide, every week there is a missionary who is killed... It is an average of one person per week who is killed in the field of missions.

Martyrdom is also an essential component of the charismatic experience of our Founder. It goes together with the dimension of his “engagement or marriage” to Africa; it is rooted in Comboni’s charismatic experience that has brought the Founder to conceive and produce the Plan for the Regeneration of Africa and especially it refers to the sacrificial love of the Good Shepherd with the Pierced Heart, whom Comboni contemplated as the model of the missionary. The center of this aspect of the Comboni’s spirituality is his love for the Cross and participation and sharing in the Pascal Mystery.

The idea of martyrdom is also co-extensive with the common vision of the Vows as a continuation of martyrdom: in the tradition of the primitive Church, Monasticism (the first form of Religious Life) is seen as a radical witness of faithfulness to Christ like martyrdom was.

II. MARTYRDOM AS THE NATURAL HORIZON OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

We will try to penetrate a bit deeper into the theological depth of the idea of martyrdom and its connection with our condition of followers of Jesus and missionaries. In this we are helped by the teaching of a great theologian of this century, Hans Urs Von Balthasar.

A christian is one who commits his life for the brethren since he himself owns his life to the his Crucified Lord.

The disposition to martyrdom, as radical witness of a love which goes beyond death, is proper of the christian as a new creature, full of the fruits of the Spirit.

“Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God’s right hand. Let your thought be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed - and he is our life - you too will be revealed with all your glory with him” (Col. 3: 1-4).

“You are God’s chosen race, his saints; he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your heart, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body. Always be thankful”. (Col. 3: 12-15).

“What the Spirit brings is very different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22).

“Try, then to imitate God, as children of his that he loves, and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God” (Ephes. 5:2).

“Thanks be to God who, wherever he goes, makes us in Christ, partners of his triumph, and through us is spreading the knowledge of himself, like a sweet smell everywhere. We are Christ’s incense to God for those who are saved and for those who are not; for the last the smell of death that leads to death; for the first the sweet smell of life that leads to life” (1 Cor. 2:14-15).

Cfr. also Phil. 4:4-7: “I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus”.

The mandate of the Christian is to testify, even with death if necessary, **that love is superior to death, is life eternal**. The faithful lives always according to death and resurrection because the whole christian existence is the attempt, the effort to answer in faith and thanksgiving to Jesus who loved us and offered himself for us (Cfr, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake” (Gal. 2:19-20).

St. Ignatius of Loyola, at the end of his Spiritual Exercises, teaches us to offer our life to God and the brethren daily in answer to Jesus, the Crucified love: “*Suscipe Domine... Take, Lord and receive...*”.

This is the conclusion that we get from the Bible: Cfr. The missionary discourse (Matthew, Ch. 10): Jesus declares that the value of his historic cross (i.e the cross that he bore and on which he died in a definite time in history) goes in reality beyond and above the puntual, historical time; it is, as it were, the permanent LIFE-FORM for all those who want to follow him.

The one who likes Jesus, chooses the Cross as the “**place**” where dying is not a possibility but an absolute certainty. This is what we must conclude from the biblical data; Martyrdom is the natural horizon of Christian Life.

We can reflect on the difference between the martyrdom of the Maccabees brothers and their mother in the Old Testament and that of Christ’s followers in the New Testament.. For the Maccabees, their death is the last human possibility of manifesting their faith in Yahweh. For the Christian, instead, it is **the condition of the new life that flows from Christ**.

“The love of Christ overwhelms us when we reflect that if one man has died for all, then all men should be dead (are dead); and the reason he died for all was so that living men should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life for them” (1 Cor. 5:14-15).

Christ's death for us is shown as "*a priori*" of Christian behavior: this is completely shaped by it. In the letter to the Romans, this objective "*a priori*" extends from Christ's action to the Christian Baptism which objectively puts the Form of Christ's death and burial as prior to any subjective faith, and soon presents the essential behavior of the Christian as determined and characterized by the same "*a priori*" and the expects it to be completely shaped by it.

"You have been taught that when we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized in his death; in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too may live a new life.

If in union with Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection. We must realize that our former selves have been crucified with him to destroy this sinful body and to free us from the slavery of sin. When a man dies, of course, he has finished with sin.

But we believe that having died with Christ we shall return to life with him: Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead will never die again. Death has no power over him anymore. When he died, he died once and for all, to sin, so his life now is life with God; and in that way, you too must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:3-11).

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake" (Gal. 2:19-20).

Faith (and life of faith) means therefore to thank with the whole of our life for the fact of being in debt for the whole or our existence because he gave his whole existence for my sake, this thanksgiving cannot be expressed but with the whole of my existence.

This is the logic of Christianity: we cannot say thanks to God in an adequate way but with our own complete existence.

The truth which constitute the measure of faith is the death of God for love of the world, for humankind and for each member of it, in the night of Jesus' cross.

All the fountains of grace spring from this night: Faith, Hope and Charity.

All that I am, **if I am more than a perishable and hopeless being whose illusions are destroyed by death**, I am because of that death which opens to me the access to God.

I blossom on the tomb of the God who died for me, put down my roots in the soil which is his flesh and blood.

Life of faith means therefore existence in death out of love: an anticipation of the offering of my life in every single situation of my Christian existence.

Christian Faith is an anticipation of the offering of my life to Christ.

An anticipation of one's death as answer to Christ's death.

It is the way of making sure in a serious way of our faith.

INTRA TUA VULNERA ABSCONDE ME (*hide me in your wounds*): we used to pray in an ancient formula. But in which **place** would we be more exposed? In which other place would we be sure of receiving more blows?. And yet that is the safest place, there would be totally safe because it is the final place: the complete openness to death out of love.

For the world, there is no other symbol or prototype than this and it was set by God.

III. MARY'S BLOODLESS MARTYRDOM AND US

The Blessed Virgin Mary went through the terrible duty of love: she was called to agree with death. The bloodless martyrdom of Mary generates the Church. (Von Balthasar speak of the "serious case": something which you cannot do away with without destroying the very essence of Christianity).

It is the fecundity (fruitfulness) of the sorrowful Mother (*Mater Dolorosa*). The birth cry coincides with the unspoken death cry in the heart of the mother at the son's death.

It is the consequence of Mary's "yes" at Nazareth, unconditional ("according to your word"): Mary's "yes" is the acceptance and the condition of Jesus' "yes" to the Father, by which all the promises are fulfilled and the Word became flesh, a flesh offered, given up and immolated, sacrificed.

This "YES" is the source and origin of all prayers. Prayer has its measure in this "YES".

“The martyrdom of the Virgin Mary, implicit in Simeon’s prophecy, is put before us in the story of the Lord’s passion. The venerable old man, Simeon, said of the infant Jesus: ‘This child is set for a sign that will be contradicted’; and to Mary: ‘A sword will pierce your soul’.

Blessed Mother, a sword did pierce your soul. For no sword could penetrate your Son’s flesh without piercing your soul. After your own son Jesus gave up his life – he was yours in a special sense through he belongs to all – the cruel lance, which opened his side and would not spare him in death though it could do him no injury, could not touch his soul. His soul was no longer there, but yours could not be set free, and it was pierced by a sword of sorrow. We rightly speak of you as more than a martyr, for the anguish of mind you suffered exceeded all bodily pain.

‘Mother, behold your son.’ These words were more painful than a sword thrust for they pierced your soul and touched the quick where soul is divided from spirit. What an exchange! John was given to you in place of Jesus, a disciple in place of the Master, a son of Zebedee in place of the Son of God, a mere man in place of the true God. These words must have pierced your loving soul, since just to recall them breaks our hearts, hard and stony though they be.

Do not marvel, brethren, that Mary is said to have endured martyrdom in her soul. Only he will marvel who forget what Paul said of the Gentiles, that among their worst vices was that they were without compassion. Not so with Mary! May it never be so with those who venerate her.

Someone may say: ‘Did she not know in advance that her Son would die? Without a doubt. ‘Did she not have sure hope of his immediate resurrection?’ Full confidence indeed. ‘Did she then grieve when he was crucified?’ Intensely. Who are you, brother, and what kind of judgment is yours that you marvel at the grief of Mary any more than that the Son of Mary should suffer? Could he die bodily and she not share his death in her heart? Charity it was that moved him to suffer death, charity greater than that of any man before or since: charity too moved Mary, the like of which no mother has ever known” (*St. Bernard; from the office of our Lady of Sorrows, 15 September*).

Like for Mary, the participation in the mystery of Christ’s death is the vocation of every Christian and we can see it especially in the lives of the Saints who have embodied in themselves the example of Christ in a more evident and exemplary way: e.g.

-**Peter** tried to impose his view on Jesus and as a consequence he denied him, but then he repented and cried miserably and learned to allow the will of Another to be accomplished in him. He came to the same “place” where Mary was (*Stabat Mater Dolorosa, iuxta crucem lacrimosa*), and his staying with Jesus on the cross would imply to die literally on the cross like Jesus. Only the tradition wants him to have died crucified like his Master, but upside down, by his own request, out of humility.

As the confession of Peter was not from “flesh and blood but from the Father” (Mat. 16:21-23), in the same way his martyrdom would require that he surrenders to a will higher than his own:

“I tell you most solemnly, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go.’ In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said:’ Follow me”. (John, 21:18-19).

St. Caterine of Siena had a great devotion to the Blood of Christ: she had a special awareness of the continuous flowing of the blood of the Cross which produces in the Church a continuous sanctification... It is a continuous being present of the Bride to the bridegroom’s death.

-What is true of the Saints is also true of **every Christian**, especially of every messenger of God’s love, every missionary, like St. Paul:

“My children, I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

The fruitfulness of our journey of imitation of Christ as well as every apostolate have to conform to the pattern of Jesus’ passion out of love.

IV. THE EUCHARIST AND MARTYRDOM

In the mystery of the Eucharist, the birth moment of the Church (which coincides with Christ’s death) is rendered present. The Church celebrates its birth not so much as something which happened in the past, but as something that is happening always, every time, in the consecration, sacrifice and communion and this in the event of the Lord’s death:

“Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death...” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Conclusion:

A faith existence is a life steeped in the mystery of Jesus' death out of love; that is: being in the truth (the truth is the fact that God has saved us by means of his death out of love, by means of the historical fact of the Incarnation). Faith is the anticipation of the offering of our life in Christ even to the supreme sacrifice of the shedding of blood. This is why:

Martyrdom is the horizon of the Christian life.



WE ARE A PRIESTLY PEOPLE

(Reflections on our Baptismal Priesthood)

INTRODUCTION

Bitterness & Resentment

“Baptism makes all Christians priests, in as much as it unites, it 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 Magisterium insist on a “priestly” reading of our Christian existence; and yet, even today, when we hear the words “priest” or “priesthood”, it is exclusively in order to designate the ordained minister. In short, the very idea of baptismal priesthood has not yet succeeded in penetrating the mentality or even the common vocabulary of our Christian communities”.

This is how an issue of the theological magazine *Credere Oggi* (January 2003) by the title “Baptismal Priesthood and Ministerial Priesthood” introduced the topic of what is commonly known as “The common priesthood of the Faithful”.

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 and consequently the persistent danger of over emphasizing the ministerial priesthood and its importance (*clericalism*) become bitter, almost exasperated complaint in the following letter of a prominent Catholic lay man to a Catholic magazine.

To the remark of a bishop: “The Council of Trent has invented the seminaries in order to form the priests, we are now in need of forming the adult Christians”, he reacts bitterly: Where has Vatican II ended? Not a single hint, not the slightest reference to the complete, immense teaching of the Council, about the priestly-prophetic-royal power of the baptized.

“Priests are missing; it is high time that the lay people become conscious of their baptism!” our worrying bishops admonish. This is what makes our lay man go mad: “No! We must live out and actuate our baptism all the time, independently of the abundance or scarcity of priests.

Lay persons must always claim sacramentally their being priests-prophets-kings in the Church (*sacramentally: meaning: because of the sacraments of Christian Initiation*).

This is not what has happened so far: because of the prevailing clericalism, even when gatherings are organized in order to study the conciliar magisterium concerning the baptismal priesthood, ironically the presiders (usually lay) end by being sidelined by the chaplains (clergy) who are supposed to assist! I am now nasty: it appears as if the hierarchy thinks that they represent the totality of the Church: a perfect organism if the laity were not there!

There is much truth in all this. I was already thinking about this when I was in Africa on the occasion of priestly ordinations' feasts; I have just come back from Bicol where I have taken part in the Feast of ordination and thanks giving mass of our 8th Filipino priest: a real triumph, a feast that brought together the whole town, a feast of joy, of ambition, a marvelous feast, a feast that honors the ministerial priesthood.

St Francis of 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 with 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!*

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

The Hidden Treasure: The Articulations of our research

Apart from any sense of resentment, the theology of our baptismal priesthood, what is commonly called the "common priesthood of the faithful" is a hidden treasure, a wealth that can enlighten our life and become a source of inspiration for our individual spiritualities. This is the purpose of these reflections. They will be articulated in 4 parts since we are going to meet in the recollections of August, September, October and November.

1. **Introduction: We are a priestly people.** We start from the realization that the theology and spirituality of the baptismal priesthood is rather unknown; that it is a hidden wealth of the Council, that it will constitute a source of enrichment if we took the time to know and to deepen this knowledge of it especially in prayer.

We continue by demonstrating that there is a baptismal priesthood or common priesthood of the faithful, that the ministerial priesthood is not in opposition or competition to it, but it is in function of it, at the service of it. We try to understand and state emphatically that the priesthood of the Church is one. This priesthood by which we all are a priestly people derives from the priesthood of Christ and is exercised in union with Christ, the High Priest of the New Testament. The priesthood of the baptized is actually the way Christ associates us to his priesthood.

We then dwell on the terminology of priesthood in order to clarify what constitute the core of the role and function of a priest and we come to the conclusion that the core is MEDIATION, to bridge the infinite gap between God and Humanity.

We conclude the first part by considering how the priesthood is the development of the covenant, is born in the context of the covenant and has as its origin God's initiative of Revelation and involvement with Humanity in Jesus.

2. The Priesthood of Jesus (Jesus Christ is the High Priest of the New Testament). It is essential to penetrate the originality of the priesthood of Jesus as the High Priest of the New Testament. Jesus Christ mediates ontologically because of the Incarnation: He is anointed as priest by the hypostatic union. But he mediates also dynamically because he learned through obedience and suffering to be a compassionate mediator.

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.

The concept of **sacrifice** according to Rene' Girard, French philosopher and anthropologist, is completely changed by Christ who really brings humanity to its maturity.

3. The Eucharist is the Christian Passover: like the Passover meal is presented as having preceded the actual event 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 way, 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.

Afterwards, and up to now, it was and is the ritual memorial of that event, with the originality of Jesus' real, sacramental presence and it is meant to help the followers of Jesus to live out the mystery of their association to the Priesthood of Christ in their every day life.

The ministerial priesthood has a distinct role in making Christ present in his Church, his priestly people.

4. The Priesthood of the Church: we are a priestly people because Christ associates us to his priesthood. Our mediation with Jesus is first of all a mediation of life. The universal vocation to holiness finds its place in this priestly perspective. Then there is the mediation of witness by which we are a prophetic people. The missionary mandate flows from our being a prophetic people. Hence comes the universal responsibility for the spreading of the Gospel.

Lastly, there is the mediation of the secular character of our Christian vocation. By this we fulfill our call to be a kingly people and it is expressed by the universal task to bring to God all created realities. The prophetic and kingly dimensions are like subordinate functions of the priestly nature of the people of God. These are the guidelines for the development of a spirituality of the baptismal priesthood.

I. THE EXISTENCE OF THE BAPTISMAL PRIESTHOOD

“With the one definitive sacrifice of the cross, Jesus communicated to all his disciples the dignity and mission of priest of the new and eternal Covenant. And thus the promise that God had made to Israel was fulfilled: “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). According to saint Peter, the whole people of the New Covenant is established as “a spiritual house”, “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 2:5). The baptized are “living stones” who build the spiritual edifice by keeping close to Christ, “that living stone...in God’s sight chosen and precious” (1 Pt 2:4).

The new priestly people which is the Church not only has its authentic image in Christ, but also receives from him a real ontological share in his one eternal priesthood, to which she must conform every aspect of her life”.

PDV 13

“The truth of the priest as it emerges from the Word of God, that is, From Jesus Christ himself and from his constitutive plan for the Church, is thus proclaimed with joyful gratitude by the **Preface of the Liturgy of the Chrism Mass**: “*By your Holy Spirit you anointed your only Son High Priest of the new and eternal Covenant. With wisdom and love you have planned that this one priesthood should continue in the Church. Christ gives the dignity of a royal priesthood to the people he has made his own”.*

N. 15: PDV

“Through Baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world”.

CL 9

“Thus 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

“He who was born of the Virgin Mary, the carpenter’s Son- as he was thought to be – Son of the living God (confessed by Peter), has come to make us ‘a kingdom of priests’. The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of the mystery of this power and of the fact that the mission-continues in the Church. Everyone, the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission”...

The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. It is a participation given to each member of the lay faithful individually, in as much as each is one of the many who form the one Body of the Lord: in fact Jesus showers his gifts upon the Church which is his Body and his Spouse.

In such a way individuals are sharers in the threefold mission of Christ in virtue of their being members of the Church, as St. Peter clearly teaches, when he defines the baptized as “ a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9). Saint Augustine writes: “ As we call everyone ‘Christians’ in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone ‘priests’ because all are members of only one priesthood”.

CL 14

II. BAPTISMAL PRIESTHOOD AND MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

“Christ gives the dignity of a royal priesthood to the people he has made his own. From these, with a brother’s love, he chooses men to share his sacred ministry by the laying on of hands. He appointed them to renew his name the sacrifice of redemption as they set before your family his paschal meal. He calls them to lead your holy people in love, nourish them by your word, and strengthen them through the sacraments. Father, they are to give their lives in your service and for the salvation of your people as they strive to grow in the likeness of Christ and honor you by their courageous witness of faith and love”.

PDV 15

“The ministry of the (ordained) priest is entirely on behalf of the Church; it aims at promoting the exercise of the common priesthood of the entire people of God.

Consequently, the ordained priesthood ought not to be thought of as existing prior to the Church, because it is totally at the service of the Church. Nor should it be considered as posterior to the ecclesial community, as if the Church could be imagined as already established without this priesthood.

N.16: PDV

“Finally, because their role and task within the Church do not replace but promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire people of God, leading it to its full ecclesial realization, priests have a positive and helping relationship to the laity. Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. They recognize and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church’s mission.

The ministerial priesthood conferred by the Sacrament of the Holy Orders and the common or “royal” priesthood of the faithful, which differ essentially and not only in degree, are ordered one to the other, for each in its own way derives from the one priesthood of Christ.

Indeed, the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it, Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood that it has received”.

N. 17: PDV

III. THE SOURCE OF PRIESTHOOD IS CHRIST

“The priesthood of Christ, the expression of his absolute “newness” in salvation history, constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all

Christian and the priest in particular. Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of priesthood”.

PDV 12

“Jesus Christ has revealed in himself the perfect and definitive features of the priesthood of the new Covenant. He did this throughout his earthly life, but especially in the central event of his passion, Death and Resurrection.

As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes, Jesus, being a man like us and at the same time the only begotten Son of God, is in his very being the perfect mediator between the Father and Humanity (Cf. Heb 8-9)”.

PDV 13

IV. THE PRIESTHOOD IS ONE

As it emerges from the careful examination of the biblical sources and the teaching of Vatican II, we must understand the priesthood of the New Testament as one: it is actually the Priesthood of Christ; there is no other priesthood. It is Christ who associates us to his priesthood as he associates us to his salvific suffering and to his mission.

So, the priesthood of the Church as priestly people exists in strict union with the priesthood of Jesus Christ and is exercised together with the power and the presence of the Risen Christ in our midst. There is no reason therefore to think that the necessary difference between the Baptismal Priesthood and the Ministerial Priesthood introduces a division in the Priesthood of the people of God. We have to see the Ministerial Priesthood as existing within the Baptismal Priesthood and a function of it.

I receive great enlightenment from a 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 of the Ministerial one, as it is more important for Augustine to be a Christian than to be a Bishop.

To be precise, **there is only one Priesthood and 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.** It is only living out my Baptismal Priesthood that I can be a good Ministerial Priest. What is needed is to understand well and deeply what Priesthood is and to become aware of how this understanding can affect our life. In other words, this is the whole purpose of these reflections: **to acquire a priestly Spirituality.**

V. TERMINOLOGY

IERÁTEUMA= Priesthood

IEREUS= Priest

Priests are not often mentioned in the Gospels. The chief priests of the Jewish people are most active in the passion narratives; all four Gospels leave the impression that the priestly aristocracy was the most malevolent and the most active of all the groups that cooperated in bringing Jesus to death. That this is not a condemnation of the entire class is suggested by AA 6:7, which notes that a large number of priests were members of the Jerusalem church.

Jesus applies the title “priest” (Gk hierus) neither to Himself nor to His disciples, and the idea of a Christian priesthood is implicit in the new Testament.

The designation of priest in the first applied to the Christian community in 1 Pt 2:5; Apc 1:6; 5:10; 20:5. These passages are all applications of the title of Israel, “a kingdom of priests” (Ex 19:6) to the Church. The Church as the new Israel fulfills also this character of the old Israel; it is probable that the application has the same meaning as the original text, **that the group so designated has a priestly character because of its election and consecration.**

The missing element is supplied in **Hebrews**, which deals almost entirely with the priesthood of Jesus.

Ex 19:3-8

Moses then went up to God, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain, saying: Say this to the house of Jacob, declare this to the sons of Israel, you yourselves have seen what I did with the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself. From this you know that now, if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my own for all the earth is mine. **I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation.** Those are the words you are to speak to the sons of Israel. So Moses went and summon the elders of the people, putting before them all that Yahweh had bidden him. Then all the people answered as one: All that Yahweh has said, we will do. And Moses took the people’s reply back to Yahweh.”

1 Peter 2:4-10

He is the living stone, rejected by men but chosen y God and precious to him; set yourselves close to him so that you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stone making a spiritual house. As scripture says: See how I lay in Zion a precious cornerstone that I have chosen and the man who rests his trust on it will not be disappointed. That means that for you who are believers, it is precious; but for unbelievers, the stone rejected by the builders has proved to be the keystone, a stone stumble over, a rock to bring men down. They stumble over it because they do not believe in the word; it was the fate in store for them.

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 mercy.

Revelation 1:4-8

From John, to the seven churches of Asia: grace and peace to you from him who is, who was, and who is to come, from the seven spirits in his presence before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the First-born from the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth. **He loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood, and made us a line of kings, priest to serve his God and father;** to hi, then, be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. It is he who is coming on the clouds; everyone will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the races of the earth will mourn over him. This is the truth. Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega says the Lord God, who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

Revelation 5:9-13

... and with them the twenty-four elders; each one of them was holding a harp and had a golden bowl full of incense made of the prayers of the saints. They sang a new hymn:

‘You are worthy to take the scroll
and break the seals of it,
because you were sacrificed, and with your blood
you bought men for God
of every race, language, people and nation
and **made them a line of kings and priests,**
to serve our God and to rule the world’.

In my vision, I heard the sound of an immense number of angels gathered round the throne and the animals and the elders; there were ten thousand times ten thousand of them and thousands upon thousands, shouting, ‘The Lamb that was sacrificed is worthy to be given power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing’.

Revelation 20:4-6

Then I saw some thrones, and I saw those who are given the power to be judges take their seats on them. I saw the souls of all who had been beheaded for having witnessed for Jesus and for having preached God’s word, and those who refused to worship the beast or his statue and would not have the brand-mark on their foreheads or hands; they came to life, and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection; the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over. Happy and blessed are those who share in the first resurrection; the second death cannot affect them, **but they will be priests of God and of Christ and reign with him for a thousand years.**

Footnote: One interpretation makes this ‘resurrection’ of the martyrs (cf. Is 26:19; Ek 37) symbolize the recovery of the Church after the Roman persecution; the reign of a thousand years’ is then the period of the kingdom of Christ on earth from the end of persecution (the fall of Rome) to the Last Judgment (in 20:11f). According to Augustine and others who follow him, the ‘reign of a thousand years’ is to be reckoned from Christ’s resurrection, and the ‘first resurrection’ is baptism, cf. Rm 6:1-10; Jn 5:25-28. A

literal interpretation of this verse was widespread in the early Church: after the first resurrection, of the martyrs, Christ was to return to reign on earth with his faithful for a thousand years. The literal millenarianism was censured.

The first death is on earth; the second ‘death’ is failure to win eternal life.

In all these passages the term used is *HIEREUS*. The term *IEREUS* does not have a correspondence in English. The only term that derives from *HIEREUS* in English is *Hieratic* (cal) that means ‘very solemn’.

The word *PRIEST* is a derivative of a Middle English term (*PREEST*) that comes from the Latin word: *PRESBYTER* (which in its turn comes from the Greek *PRESBYTEROS*, comparative of *PRESBUS*=old man) means *ELDER*.

The term that corresponds with *HIEREUS* is the Latin *SACERDOS* (in Italian: *SACERDOTE*) and it means: *person who deals with what is sacred*. In English there is only the adjective: *sacerdotal*.

VI. PRIESTHOOD MEANS MEDIATION

But the term which expresses better the nature of Priesthood is the Latin term: *PONTIFEX* (in Italian *PONTEFICE*) which means **BRIDGE MAKER/BUILDER: The Person who bridges the gap between God and Humanity: THE MEDIATOR**. In English we have the word: *PONTIFF* (The Supreme Pontiff); the adjective: *pontifical*, and the verb: *to pontificate* which has a derogatory meaning (to speak as if one were the only person to know the facts/but sarcastic).

MEDIATION is the best term to describe or define the mission of the Priest: to bridge the infinite gap between God and Humanity.

-This is how the letter to the *Hebrews* describes the Priesthood of Christ: the whole letter is a demonstration of the superiority of the worship, the sanctuary and the mediation of Christ, the supreme high priest of the New Testament:

“We have seen that he (Christ) has been given a ministry of a far higher order, and to the same degree it is a better covenant of which he is the MEDIATOR, founded on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6).

-This is how the same concept is neatly summarized and clearly expressed by the *Magisterium*:

“Jesus Christ has revealed in himself the perfect and definitive features of the priesthood of the new Covenant. He did this throughout his earthly life, but especially in the central event of his passion, Death and Resurrection.

As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes, Jesus, being a man like us and at the same time the only begotten Son of God, is in his very being **the perfect mediator between the Father and Humanity** (Cf. Heb 8-9)”.

“The priesthood of Christ, the expression of his absolute “newness” in salvation history, constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all Christian and the priest in particular. Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of priesthood”.

PDV 12, 13

Technically Christ is the one and only true mediator: he is true man and true God, Col 2:9, and so the one and only intermediary, Rom 5:15-19; 1Tim 2:5; cf. 1 Co 3:22-23; 11:3, between God and the human race. He unites them and reconciles them, 2 Co 5:14-20. Through him come grace, Jo 1:16-17; Ep 1:7, and complete revelation, Heb 1:1-2. In heaven he continues to intercede for those who are faithful to him, 7:25.

Mediation describes the essence of the mission of the 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.

It is the very purpose of these reflections to elaborate on the meaning of this mediation to which Jesus associate us, his Church, the priestly people, and to see what it means in terms of spirituality: how we live up to the expectations of our priestly spirituality.

VII. PRIESTHOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVENANT

To understand properly the meaning of the Priesthood of the New Testament, we must see it as the climax of that relationship between God and Humankind that starts with Revelation and the Covenant.

1. It is with Abraham with whom the relationship of God with us becomes an historical event that reveals God’s initiative of love.

This is well expressed in the famous episode of the visit of the three mysterious characters to Abraham and Sara:

Genesis 18:1-15

Yahweh appeared to him at the Oak of Mamre while he was sitting by the entrance of the tent during the hottest part of the day. He looked up, and there he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, and bowed to the ground. My lord,’ he said ‘I beg you, if I find favor with you, kindly do not pass your servant by. A little water shall be brought; you shall wash your feet and lie down under the tree. Let me fetch a little bread and you shall refresh yourselves before going further. That is why you have come in your servant’s direction.’ They replied, ‘Do as you say’.

Abraham hastened to the tent to find Sarah. ‘Hurry,’ he said ‘knead three bushels of flour and make loaves.’ Then running to the cattle Abraham took a fine and tender calf and gave it to the servant, who hurried to prepare it. Then taking cream, milk and the calf he had prepared, he laid all before them, and they ate while he remained standing near them under the tree.

‘Where is your wife Sarah? They asked him. ‘She is in the tent’ he replied. Then his guest said, ‘I shall visit you again next year without fail, and your wife will then have a son’. Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well on in years, and Sarah had ceased to have her monthly periods. So Sarah laughed to herself, thinking, ‘Now that I am past the age of child-bearing, and my husband is an old man, is pleasure to come my way again!’ But Yahweh asked Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Am I really going to have a child now that I am old?” Is anything too wonderful for Yahweh? At the same time next year I shall visit you again and Sarah will have a son’. ‘I did not laugh’ Sarah said, lying because she was afraid. But he replied, ‘Oh yes, you did laugh’.

The intimacy between Yahweh and the family of Abraham is described so beautifully, with Trinitarian undertones, that this scene became the object of the world famous Rublev’s icon. It shows God’s involvement with humanity, his concern for them, his tenderness and his love. The Prophets will be those who show that at the heart of the Covenant there is love.

2. But love will imply very soon suffering/sacrifice/mediation/priesthood. Already we have a foretaste of this in the episode of Gideon and the Angel of Yahweh:

Judges 6:15-24

Gideon answered him, ‘Forgive me, my lord, but how can I deliver Israel? My clan, you must know, is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least important in my family’. Yahweh answered him, ‘I will be with you and you shall crush Midian as though it were a single man.’ Gideon said to him. ‘If I have found favour in your sight, give me a sign that it is you who speak to me. I beg you, do not go away until I come back. I will bring you my offering and set it down before you.’ And he answered. ‘I will stay until you return.’

Gideon went away and prepared a young goat and made unleavened cakes with an ephah of flour. He put the meat into a basket and the broth into a pot, then brought it all to him under the terebinth. As he came near, the angel of Yahweh said to him, ‘Take the meat and unleavened cakes, put them on this rock and pour the broth over them’. Gideon did so. Then the angel of Yahweh reached out the tip of the staff in his hand and touched the meat and unleavened cakes. Fire sprang from the rock and consumed the meat and unleavened cakes and the angel of Yahweh vanished before his eyes. Then Gideon knew this was the angel of Yahweh and he said, ‘Alas, my Lord Yahweh! I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face! Yahweh answered him, ‘Peace be with you; have no fear; you will not die’. Gideon built an altar there to Yahweh and called it Yahweh-Peace.

3. But the figure that embodies the characteristics of priesthood, at the time of the Old Testament, is Moses. We see this in his role in performing the sacrifice that seals the Covenant between Yahweh and the chosen people; and especially in his mediation of intercession on the occasion of the episode of the golden calf.

Exodus 24:3-8

Moses went and told the people all the commands of Yahweh and all the ordinances. In answer, all the people said with one voice, 'We will observe all the commands that Yahweh has decreed'. Moses put all the commands of Yahweh into writing, and early next morning he built an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve standing-stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he directed certain young Israelites to offer holocausts and to immolate bullocks to Yahweh as communion sacrifices. Half of the blood Moses took up and put into basins, the other half he cast on the altar. And taking the Book of the Covenant he read it to the listening people and they said, 'We will observe all that Yahweh has decreed; we will obey'. Then Moses took the blood and cast it towards the people. 'This' he said 'is the blood of the Covenant that Yahweh has made with you, containing all these rules'

Exodus 32: 7-14

Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, 'Go down now, because your people whom you brought out of Egypt have apostatized. They have been quick to leave the way I marked out for them; they have made themselves a calf of molten metal and have worshipped it and offered it sacrifice. "Here is your God, Israel," they have cried, "who brought you up from the land of Egypt!" Yahweh said to Moses, ' I can see how headstrong these people are! Leave me, now, my wrath shall blaze out against them and devour them; of you, however, I will make a great nation.

But Moses pleaded with Yahweh his God. 'Yahweh,' he said 'why should your wrath blaze out against this people of yours whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with arm outstretched and mighty hand? Why let the Egyptians say, " Ah, it was in treachery that he brought them out, to do them to death in the mountains and wipe them off the face of the earth"? Leave your burning wrath; relent and do not bring this disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, your servants to whom by your own self you swore and made this promise: I will make your offspring as many as the stars of heaven, and all this land which I promised I will give to your descendants, and it shall be their heritage for ever. So Yahweh relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Moses and the prayer of the mediator: "*Standing in the breach*"

Once the promise begins to be fulfilled (Passover, the Exodus, the gift of the Law and the ratification of the covenant), the prayer of Moses becomes the most striking example of intercessory prayer, which will be fulfilled in ' the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus'.

Here again the initiative is God's. From the midst of the burning bush he calls Moses. This event will remain one of the primordial images of prayer in the spiritual tradition of Jews and Christians alike. When 'the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob' calls Moses to be his servant, it is because he is the living God who wants men to live. God reveals himself in order to save them, though he does not do this alone or despite them: he calls Moses to be his messenger, an associate in his compassion, his work of salvation.

There is something of a divine plea in this mission, and only after long debate does Moses attune his own will to that of the Savior God. But in the dialogue in which God confides in him, Moses also learns how to pray: he balks, makes excuses, above all questions: and it is in response to his question that the Lord confides his ineffable name, which will be revealed through his mighty deeds.

‘Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friends.’ Moses’ prayer is characteristic of contemplative prayer by which God’s servant remains faithful to his mission. Moses converses with God often and at length, climbing the mountain to hear and entreat him and coming down to the people to repeat the words of his God for their guidance.

From this intimacy with the faithful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, Moses drew strength and determination for his intercession. He does not pray for himself but for the people whom God made his own. Moses already intercedes for them during the battle with the Amalekites and prays to obtain healing for Miriam. But it is chiefly after their apostasy that Moses ‘stands in the breach’ before God in order to save the people.

The arguments of his prayer-for intercession is also a mysterious battle –will inspire the boldness of the great intercessors among the Jewish people and in the Church: God is love; he is therefore righteous and faithful; he cannot contradict himself; he must remember his marvelous deeds, since his glory is at stake, and he cannot forsake this people that bears his name.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

(JESUS IS THE HIGH PRIEST OF THE NEW TESTAMENT)

Introduction

1. Let us start with the vision of the book of Revelation referring to the Lamb that appears as slain (this passage is used in the Breviary as a hymn of the New Testament and we are certainly familiar with it):

“... and with them the twenty-four elders; each one of them was holding a harp and had a golden bowl full of incense made of the prayers of the saints. They sang a new hymn:

*‘You are worthy to take the scroll
and break the seals of it,*

*because you were sacrificed, and with your blood
you bought men for God
of every race, language, people and nation
and made them a line of kings and priests,
to serve our God and to rule the world'.*

In my vision, I heard the sound of an immense number of angels gathered round the throne and the animals and the elders; there were ten thousand times ten thousand of them and thousands upon thousands, shouting, 'The Lamb that was sacrificed is worthy to be given power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing'.

(Revelation 5:9-13)

This passage helps us to focus on the center of the topic concerning the Baptismal Priesthood that appears as our association with the priesthood of Christ. It is therefore from the thorough consideration and study of the Priesthood of Christ that we must start.

2. MEDIATION is the best term to describe or define the mission of the Priest: to bridge the infinite gap between God and Humanity.

-This is how the letter to the *Hebrews* describes the Priesthood of Christ: the whole letter is a demonstration of the superiority of the worship, the sanctuary and the mediation of Christ, the supreme high priest of the New Testament:

“We have seen that he (Christ) has been given a ministry of a far higher order, and to the same degree it is a better covenant of which he is the MEDIATOR, founded on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6).

“He bring a new covenant as the mediator, only so that the people who were called to an eternal inheritance may actually receive what was promised: his death took place to cancel the sins that infringed the earlier covenant” (Hebrews 9:15)

“...You have come to God himself, the supreme Judge, and been place with the spirits of the saints who have been made perfect; and to Jesus, the mediator who brings a new covenant and a blood for purification which pleads more insistently than Abel's” (Hebrews 12:24)

The words in Greek are: -mesites Theou kai anthropon
-Mesites tes kainesdiathekes

There is another famous passage where Jesus is called Mediator, and it comes from

1 Timothy 2: 1-8

My advice is that, first of all, there should be prayers offered for everyone – petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving – and especially for kings and others in authority, so that we may be able to live religious and reverent lives in peace and quiet. To do this is right, and will please God our savior:

he wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus, who sacrificed himself as a ransom for them all. He is the evidence of this, sent at the appointed time, and I have been named a herald and apostle of it and – I am telling the truth and no lie- a teacher of the faith and the truth to the pagans.

In every place, then, I want the men to lift their hands up reverently in prayer, with no anger or argument.

3. This is how the same concept is neatly summarized and clearly expressed by the *Magisterium*:

“Jesus Christ has revealed in himself the perfect and definitive features of the priesthood of the new Covenant. He did this throughout his earthly life, but especially in the central event of his passion, Death and Resurrection.

As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes, Jesus, being a man like us and at the same time the only begotten Son of God, is in his very being **the perfect mediator between the Father and Humanity** (Cf. Heb 8-9)”.

“The priesthood of Christ, the expression of his absolute “newness” in salvation history, constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all Christian and the priest in particular. Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of priesthood”.

PDV 12, 13

Technically Christ is the one and only true mediator: he is true man and true God, Col 2:9, and so the one and only intermediary, Rom 5:15-19; 1Tim 2:5; cf. 1 Co 3:22-23; 11:3, between God and the human race. He unites them and reconciles them, 2 Co 5:14-20. Through him come grace, Jo 1:16-17; Ep 1:7, and complete revelation, Heb 1:1-2. In heaven he continues to intercede for those who are faithful to him, 7:25.

Mediation describes the essence of the mission of the 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.

It is the very purpose of these reflections to elaborate on the meaning of this mediation to which Jesus associate us, his Church, the priestly people, and to see what it means in terms of spirituality: how we live up to the expectations of our priestly spirituality.

4. It is essential to penetrate the **originality of the priesthood of Jesus** as the High Priest of the New Testament.

Jesus Christ mediates:

1. **ontologically** because of the Incarnation: He is anointed as priest by the hypostatic union.
2. But he mediates also **dynamically** because he learned through obedience and suffering to be a compassionate mediator.
3. The **final and conclusive mediation** is accomplished by Jesus through his *Pascal Mystery: by the sacrifice of self*, accepted in obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus mediated our peace with God and the new and everlasting covenant/testament by which we find final and definite salvation in the name of Jesus. The concept of **sacrifice** according to Rene' Girard, French philosopher and anthropologist, is completely changed by Christ who really brings humanity to its maturity.

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

FIRST POINT: CHRIST'S MEDIATION OF LIFE

Jesus Christ is mediator first of all by his life. The best passage that describe Christ's mediation of life is the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:6-11. There we find the way God the Son entered into our human nature by means of *kenosis* (emptying) and *synkatabasis* (condescendence). But we can understand this without using difficult words, only by considering the 3 movements that are exemplary of every insertion/incarnation:

- **Going out:** God the Son was happy in the eternal embrace of the Father, rich of the same immense and infinity divinity; but he came out of it, so to speak in order to save us by becoming one of us as a man, a human being.
- **Going down:** Not happy of having become one of us, Jesus Christ wants to experience all the human condition/drama/tragedy and he accept to experience death, even death on the cross.
- **Going in:** the death on the Cross, that we will consider later as the peak of the mediating work of Jesus, the High Priest of the New Testament, is the conclusion of the Incarnation: going in, into the flesh/humanity/the human condition.

Here I am thinking of **the example of 2 confreres** who in an eminent way have implemented in their lives the 3 movements of the mediation of life: Going out, Going down and Going in:

- **Fr. Alessandro Zanolli** in the slums of Nairobi: Korokocho has become famous because of him and the symbol of a place where circumstances of extreme poverty and abjection make us think and understand the needs of our present world in its contrasts and the challenges that that situation gives to the followers of Jesus who are called the priestly people that is the people of mediators.

- **Fr Ezechiele Ramin** in his effort to the descent into the world of the *campesinos* and their problems, especially the problem of the land, etc.....

They were actually true sons of **Saint Daniel Comboni** who fulfilled in his life the triple movement of incarnation/insertion: he went out of his family/world and down to the heart of Africa:1857 (he was only 26)...He had to come away to save his life attacked by sickness, but he remained faithful to his passion for Africa and he came back and expressed this mediation of life in **his first speech as a bishop**:

“Unfortunate Africa was the first love of my youth. I left behind what was dearest to me in the world and came to these lands 16 years ago to offer my work for the relief of its century –old misfortunes. ...But my heart remained here among you...Today I come back to you at last and I regain my heart. Here before you I open it to the sublime and religious feeling of my spiritual fatherhood. I am already your father and you are my children and as such for the first time I embrace you and press you to my heart....I return among you , never again to cease to be yours and entirely consecrated to your greater good. Day and night, sun and rain will find me equally ready to help your spiritual needs. Rich and poor, healthy or sick, young and old, master and servant, shall always find admittance to my heart. Your good shall be mine, and your sufferings shall be mine too. I shall make common cause with everyone of you, and the happiest of my days will be the one when I shall be able to give my life for you”.

SECOND POINT:

CHRIST’S MEDIATION OF INTERCESSION

In the person of Jesus, God and Humanity meet. It is by the blessed humanity of Jesus that the actions of mediation are performed. Here we consider two aspects: his sharing our human drama and his priestly prayer of intercession. It is again the letter to the Hebrews that highlights the personality of the High Priest of the New Testament: one who learns through sufferings his role of obedience to the Father’s will.

The letter to the Hebrews deals almost entirely with the priesthood of Jesus.

Jesus was not a member of the tribe of Levi and could not be a “priest” in the mind of the Jews. His priesthood is vindicated by the application to Him of the priesthood of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4; Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20). As a man without father, mother, and genealogy (not mentioned in Gn 14), he is a type of the timeless Son of God.

Jesus has a superior covenant, the new covenant mentioned by Jr 31:31 ff (8:6-13), the covenant which is a “testament” (a play upon the Gk word *diathēkē*) rendered effective by the death of the testator; this death is sacrificially effective, for it is a death by the shedding of blood (9:15-22).

The dignity of His priesthood rest ultimately upon His sonship (3:2 ff; 5:1-10), which is a far higher claim to mediation and union with God than Aaron possessed. The ancient sacrificial cult, which was imperfect, is fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus (9-10); its atonement is perfect because of the excellence of the victim, Himself.

He has the solidarity with men which the priest as mediator must have: He has experienced human weakness (4:14f; 5:2), He has suffered (5:7-10), He is like His brothers in every respect (2:17), although He is Himself sinless (7:26f, 2:18; 4:15) and therefore has no need of offering atonement for Himself.

He is the victim which He offers (7:27; 9:12; 14, 25; 10:5ff) not the animal victims of the old law. And therefore His one single offering need not be repeated and cannot be repeated, because it is **totally offered and totally effective** (7:27; 9:24-28; 10:10, 12, 14). So the ancient sacrificial cult is abolished (10:9; 7:18; 8:13).

The sacrifice of Christ effects redemption (9:12), salvation (10:18), forgiveness (9:15), purification (10:18; 9:14), sanctification (10:10, 22), perfection (10:14). It is the foundation of a new cult (9:14; 13:15 ff).

This is perhaps the most systematic theological exposition of the entire New Testament, and the effects of Hebrews on the formation of the Christian priesthood in the early Church are incalculable.

The Priestly Prayer of Jesus:

The evangelists have preserved **two examples of prayer** offered by Christ *during his public ministry*. Each begins with thanksgiving. In the first (Mt 11:25-30), Jesus confesses the Father, acknowledges and blesses him because he has hidden the mysteries of the Kingdom from those who think themselves learned and has revealed them to infants, the poor of the beatitudes. **His exclamation, ‘Yes, Father!’ expresses the depth of his heart, his adherence to the Father’s good pleasure’, echoing his mother’s Fiat** at the time of his conception and prefiguring what he will say to the Father in this loving adherence of his human heart to the mystery of the will of the Father.

The second prayer, before the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41-42), contains the words: ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me’, which implies that the Father always hears his petitions. Jesus immediately adds: ‘I know that you always hear me’, which implies that Jesus, on his part, constantly made such petitions.

When the hour has come for him to fulfill the Father’s plan of love, Jesus allows a glimpse of the boundless depth of his filial prayer, not only before he freely delivered himself up (‘Abba... not my will, but yours’), but even in his last words on the Cross, where prayer and the gift of self are but one: ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’, Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’; ‘Woman, behold your son’-‘Behold your mother’; ‘I thirst’; ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’; ‘It is finished’; ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit! Until the ‘loud cry’ as he expires, giving up his spirit.

All the troubles, for all time, of humanity enslaved by sin and death, all the petitions and intercessions of salvation history are summed up in this cry of the incarnate Word. Here the Father accepts them and, beyond all hope, answers them by raising his Son. Thus is fulfilled and brought to completion **the drama of prayer** in the economy of creation and salvation. The Psalter gives us the key to prayer in Christ. In the ‘today’ of the Resurrection, the Father says: ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possessions.

The Letter to the Hebrews expresses in dramatic terms how the prayer of Jesus accomplished the victory of salvation; *‘ In the day of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him’*”.

The Prayer of the Hour of Jesus

When ‘his hour’ came, Jesus prayed to the Father. His prayer, the longest transmitted by the Gospel, embraces the whole economy of creation and salvation, as well as his death and Resurrection. The prayer of the Hour of Jesus always remains his own, just as his Passover ‘ once for all’ remains ever present in the liturgy of his Church.

Christian tradition rightly calls this prayer the ‘priestly’ prayer of Jesus. It is the prayer of our high priest, inseparable from his sacrifice, from his passing over (Passover) to the Father to whom he is wholly “consecrated”

In this Paschal and sacrificial prayer, everything is recapitulated in Christ: God and the world; the Word and the flesh; eternal life and time; the love that hands itself over and the sin that betrays it; the disciples present and those who will believe in him by their word; humiliation and glory. It is the prayer of unity.

Jesus fulfilled the work of the Father completely; his prayer, like his sacrifice, extends until the end of time. The prayer of this hour fills the end-times and carries them towards their consummation. Jesus, the Son to whom the Father has given all things, has given himself wholly back to the Father; yet express himself with a sovereign freedom by virtue of the power the Father has given him over all flesh. The Son, who made himself Servant, is Lord, the Pantocrator. Our high priest who prays for us is also the one who prays in us and the God who hears our prayer.

By entering into the holy name of the Lord Jesus we can accept, from within, the prayer he teaches us: ‘Our Father!’ His priestly prayer fulfills, from within, the great petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: concern for the Father’s name; passionate zeal for his Kingdom (glory); the accomplishment of the will of the Father, of his plan of salvation; and deliverance from evil.

Finally, in this prayer Jesus reveals and gives to us the ‘knowledge’, inseparably one, of the Father and of the Son, which is the very mystery of the life of prayer.

In the history of the Church, we have **so many examples of the mediation of prayer** by the outstanding disciples of Jesus, the Saints. One of the most outstanding is the example of **St Therese of the Child Jesus** in her famous passage of her autobiography in which she understand her mission of intercession: “In the mystical body of the Church, I will be the heart” and again: “Deep down in the heart of Mother Church, I shall be love”.

But what I remember is the example of a sister whom I met when I was a young missionary before going to Africa: **Sr Mariangela Valentini** and another **sister Serena D. Drakaici**: they are outstanding examples of this mediation of intercession.

THIRD POINT: CHRIST'S MEDIATION OF SACRIFICE

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

1. Hebrews 10: 4-21

“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 fro 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.'*

Notice that he says first: You did not want the Law lays down as the things to be offered, that is: the sacrifices, the oblation, the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin, and you took no pleasure in them; and then he says: Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. He is abolishing the first sort to replace it with the second. And this *will* was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ.

All the priest stand at their duties everyday, offering over and over again the same sacrifices which are quite incapable of taking sins away. He, on the other hand, has offered one single sacrifices for sins, and then taken his place for ever, at the right hand of God, where he is now waiting until his enemies are made into a footstool for him. By virtue of that once single offering, he has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying. The Holy Spirit assures us of this; for he says, first: *This is the covenant I will make with them when those days arrive;* and the Lord then goes on to say: *I will put my laws into their hearts and write them on their minds. I will never call their sins to mind, or their offenses.* .When all sins have been forgiven, there can be no more sin offerings.

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. So as we go in let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith, our minds sprinkled and free from any trace of bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us keep firm in the hope we profess, because the one who made the promise is faithful. Let us be concerned for each other to stir a response in love and good works. Do not stay away from the meetings of the community, as some do, but encourage each other to go; the more so as you see the Day drawing near”.

2. **Sacrifice:** It should be noticed that it is *a universal phenomenon* and that scarcely any religion is known which does not have a sacrificial ritual. The nature of the symbolism of sacrifice and of the ideas from which it arises are the result of the belief in the deity and the desire to worship him.

Sacrifice can be descriptively defined in general *as a material oblation made to the deity by means of a consecration and consumption of the thing offered*. The purpose of this oblation is to establish or maintain communion with the deity.

These theories point out the following elements in sacrifice: (1) the gift of man to the deity; (2) the expiation of offenses; (3) communion with the deity in the sacrificial banquet; (4) life released from the victim, transmitted to the deity and conferred upon the worshippers.

The common meal among many people is the supreme symbol of fellowship, and the sacrificial banquet is a symbol of existing fellowship with the deity.

If there is a basic element, it is the gift; in the ancient world the subject was expected to bring a gift to the king to assure his benevolence if it was assumed to exist, or to restore it if the visitor was afraid that he was not in good standing. The element of the banquet is clear in the nature of the victims, which in the Old Testament are food and drink, even when these are not shared by the worshipers. The victim proper is an animal; cereal offerings and libations appear only as accompaniments of animal sacrifices; they make the sacrifice a complete meal.

The common symbolic element in all Old Testament sacrifices is the manipulation of the blood; and since it is universal, it very probably symbolizes the essential note of the sacrificial symbolism. The blood is sprinkled on the altar, or dashed at its base, or smeared on the horns. The altar symbolizes the deity. In Old Testament thought the blood is the precise symbolic act of oblation by which the life of the animal is transmitted to the deity. The mere slaughtering of the animal is not a ritually symbolic act. Another common ritual act is the imposition of hands upon the victim; this does not appear to support any theories of the ritual substitution of the victim for the offerer, but rather is an act by which the offerer declares that this is his offering.

Jesus repeats the prophetic criticism of sacrifice by quoting Ho 6:6 (Mt 9:13; 12:7); His insistence on the need of genuine interior piety is entirely in accord with the prophetic teaching (cf LAW; Pharisees). Sacrifice is metaphorically good deeds ("Spiritual Sacrifices," 1 Pt 2:5) or submission to God ("present your bodies as a living sacrifice," Rm 12:1)

There is no doubt that sacrificial terms are rare in the Gospels and the Pauline literature; but there are good reasons for believing that Hebrew makes explicit what was believed and taught in the primitive apostolic instruction. In Hebrews 9-10 the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus are contrasted with the priesthood and sacrifice of Israel and Judaism. **The atoning blood of the new covenant is the blood of Jesus** (9:12-14). A Covenant cannot be ratified without blood (9:15-21) and there is no forgiveness without

CELEBRATING OUR PRIESTHOOD

THE EUCHARIST

THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER

Introduction

“Since in Jesus, the Son of God, we have Supreme High Priest who has gone through to the highest heaven, we must never let go of the faith that we have professed. For it is not as if we had a High Priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin. Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help” (Heb 4:14-16).

**O SACRUM CONVIVIUM IN QUO CHRISTUS SUMITUR,
RECOLITUR MEMORIAM PASSIONIS EIUS, MENS IMPLETUR
GRATIA ET FUTURAE GLORIAE NOBIS PIGNUS DATUR”**

(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!)

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. It is to this most beautiful topic that we must now direct our attention. 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?

If not, what is the position of the Eucharist as regard the larger view of the comprehensive character of the priesthood of Christ and of the Church as a whole, as priestly people? The Eucharist has a central position in Christian/Catholic life, in the life of the Church: it is therefore vital to understand its depth and relevance together with its role, in order to develop a priestly spirituality, to have a priestly reading of our Christian life.

1.THE EUCHARIST IS THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER:

The Passover is both:

1. The intervention of God to free His people
2. The ceremonial meal.

Like the Passover meal is presented as having preceded the actual event 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 way, 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.

Afterwards, and up to now, it was and **is the ritual memorial of that event**, with the originality of Jesus' real, sacramental presence and it is meant to help the followers of Jesus to live out the mystery of their association to the Priesthood of Christ in their every day life.

The ministerial priesthood has a distinct role in making Christ present in his Church, his priestly people.

The Passover commemorated the great saving event, the deliverance of Israel from slavery and its constitution as the people of Yahweh. The first Passover supper takes place in Egypt as an anticipation of the saving event which occurred that night.

The new Passover is likewise anticipated by a dinner; and at this dinner the new Passover lamb is consumed by the disciples, the little core of the New Israel. The Lamb is consumed sacramentally.

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

Then the Eucharist becomes the “**proclamation**” of the atoning death (1 Co 11:26). It is a “**memorial**” (Lk 22:19; 1 Co 11:24f) in the sense of *cultic recital and reenactment* of the saving event, by which each participant experiences the event and is personally integrated into the death and the resurrection of Jesus, in terms of which Paul often describes the new life of the Christian.

The Jewish Passover lamb is not clearly a sacrificial animal. But the motif of sacrifice and atonement is explicit in the Eucharist: the body and blood are “for many”, “for you,” and the atoning character of the death is stated as clearly in these formulae as anywhere in the New Testament. In these phrases we perceive an echo of the description of the Servant of Yahweh (Is 53). But this we will see better presently.

2. TERMINOLOGY & SOURCES

The name Eucharist (Gk *eucharistia*, “thanksgiving”, also *eulogia*, “praise”) to designate the sacramental rite of the offering and consumption of bread and wine does not appear in the New Testament; it is first employed in the *Didache* (late 1st century) and is used by Ignatius of Antioch and Justin.

In the New Testament it is called “*the Lord’s Supper*”(1 Co 11:20), the *Agape* (Jude 12), and possibly “*the breaking of the bread*” (AA 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11).

- **There can be no doubt that the rite existed from the very beginning of the Church** (AA 2:42; the witness of 1 Co is the earliest witness to the rite).
- **Nor can there be any doubt that the Eucharist was the cult of the primitive community.**

- **It was celebrated on the day after Sabbath**, very probably because this was the day of the resurrection, the day that initiated the new week and the new age of salvation.

The choice of the day of the resurrection was not without its symbolism also; the Eucharist, while it commemorates the death of Jesus, commemorates not the death simply **but the death as a phase in the saving process, which is fulfilled in the glorification of Jesus**. The Eucharist was celebrated as a supper, and very probably at the usual Roman hour of dinner, the late afternoon.

- **The Eucharist clearly appears to be the Christian Passover.**

The biblical sources of the Eucharist: The most *ancient* text is 1Corinthians; the most *complete* account is in Luke and the eucharistic sermon in John 6 is remarkable especially for the *realism* of the flesh of Christ being real food.

1 Corinthians 11:23-27

For this is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you: that on the same night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it, and he said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me’. In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me. ‘Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death, and so anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be behaving unworthily towards the body and blood of the Lord.

Luke 22:14-20

When the hour came he took his place at table, and the apostle with him. And he said to them, ‘I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; because, I tell you, I shall not eat again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’

Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and share it among you, because from now on, I Tell you, I shall not drink wine until the kingdom of God comes’.

Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body which will be given for you; do this an a memorial of me. He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you.

MYSTERIUM PASCHALE & MYSTERIUM EUCHARISTICUM

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*:

“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 followed it. Those days embrace the *Mysterium Paschale*, they also embrace the *Mysterium Eucharisticum*, **The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the events that 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 witness 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 (Lk 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** (Heb 9:11-12)” (EDE 3).

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 center 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 the prayers (Acts 2:42). The breaking of the 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 Mystery.” (EDE 3).

Mysterium Paschale is different from Mysterium Eucharisticum. On Holy Friday, no Eucharist is celebrated to make us realize that difference. But the Eucharist is the sacrament of the Paschal Mystery.

4. THE GIFT OF THE EUCHARIST

“*Mysterium Fidei!* – The Mystery of Faith! When the priest recites or chants these words, all present acclaim: **We announce your death, o Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection, until you come in glory.**

In these and similar words the Church, while pointing to Christ in the mystery of his passion, also reveals her own mystery: **Ecclesia de Eucharistia**. By the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church was born and set out upon the pathways of the world, yet a decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. **Her foundation and wellspring is the whole Triduum**

Paschale, but this is as it were gathered up, foreshadow and concentrated for ever in the gift of the Eucharist.

In this gift, Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church the perennial making present of the Paschal Mystery. With it he brought about a mysterious oneness in time between the *Triduum* and the passing of the centuries” (EDE 5).

“The Eucharist is indelibly marked by the event of the Lord’s passion and death, of which it is not only a reminder but the sacramental representation. **It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages**” (EDE 11)

“The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord as the gift par excellence for it is **the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work.** Nor does it remain confined in the past, since all that Christ is, all that he did and suffered for all men, participate in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times” (EDE 11)

5. THE EUCHARIST AS SACRIFICE

“The Mass is at the same time and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord’s body and blood” (EDE 12)

1. In the institution narratives, the **sacrificial character** appears explicitly in the allusions to the covenant and the covenant sacrifice (cf Ex 24). The covenant is sealed by sacrifice which symbolizes the bond; Jesus, as the bond of the new covenant through His death, is the victim of the covenant sacrifice.

2. The sacrificial motif is likewise explicit in the conception of the Eucharist as a **sacrificial banquet**; this is clearly stated by Paul (1 Co 10:14-22). There the consumption of the Eucharist is a decisive motif for the prohibition of any participation in pagan sacrifices by Christians.

“This is the reason, my dear brothers, why you must keep clear of idolatry. I say to you as sensible people: judge for yourself what I am saying. **The blessing-cup that we bless is a communion with the blood of Christ, and the bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ.** The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf. Look at the other Israel, the race, where those who eat the sacrifices are in communion with the altar. Does that mean that the food sacrificed to idols has real value, or that the idol itself is real? Not at all! It simply means that the sacrifices that they offer they sacrifice to demons that are not God. I have no desire to see you in communion with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot take your share at the table of the Lord and at the table of demons. Do we want to make the Lord angry; are we stronger than he is?”

3. “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice. St John Chrysostom puts it well: We always offer the same Lamb, not one today and another tomorrow, but always the same one. For this reason the sacrifice is always only

one... Even now we offer that victim that was once offered and who will never be consumed” (EDE 12) (whose love will never be consumed)

4. “The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it. What is repeated is the *memorial celebratio*, its commemorative representation (*memorialis demonstratio*), which makes Christ’s one, definitive, redemptive sacrifice always present in time. The sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic mystery cannot therefore be understood as something separate, independent of the Cross or only indirectly referring to the sacrifice on Calvary” (EDE 13)

5. “In giving his sacrifice to the Church, Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ. This is the teaching of Second Vatican Council concerning all the faithful: Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, **they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it.**” (EDE 13)

6. O SACRUM CONVIVIUM: THE EUCHARIST AS COMMUNION

1. The sacrificial element, prominent in the passage of I Co 10:14-22 and implicit in the formulae of institution, is communion with the deity in the sacrificial banquet.

THE REAL PRESENCE. Through the Eucharist the deity is rendered present in a striking and unique fashion: Communion is achieved only through Jesus Christ, who is man, and as man is body. The body is therefore rendered really present; the language of the four sources and of John leaves no room for mere symbolism in this respect. The manner in which the bread and wine are the body **is a mystery of faith**, the term which the Church herself has consecrated; theological speculation, necessary and useful as it is to protect the belief against misunderstanding, has not achieved and will not achieve an understanding of the reality of the sacramental presence of Jesus. The body which is present is the glorified body. But this is the body “which was delivered for you”, one and the same Lord Jesus who died, rose, and sits at the right hand of the Father. Communion is achieved through the participation of the body and the blood of the victim. The salvation of the New Testament is not directed to the soul, but to the man, and man in Hebrew thought is body; if salvation is to reach man, his communion with the Savior must be a communion of body.

2. “ The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realized when the Lord’s body and blood are received in communion. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through communion. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me (Jn 6:57). Jesus himself reassures us that this union, which he compares to that of the life of the Trinity, is truly realized.” (EDE 16)

3. “Through our communion in his body and blood, Christ also grants us his Spirit. He who eats it with faith, eats Fire and Spirit... Take and eat this, all of you, and eat with it

the Holy Spirit. For it is truly my body and whoever eats it will have eternal life. The Church implores this divine Gift, the source of every other gift, in the Eucharistic epiclesis.” (EDE 17)

4. “For in the Eucharist we also receive **the pledge of our bodily resurrection** at the end of the world: He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (Jn 6:54). This pledge of the future resurrection comes from the fact that the flesh of the Son of Man, given as food, is his body in its glorious state after the resurrection. With the Eucharist we digest, as it were, the secret of the resurrection. For this reason Saint Ignatius of Antioch rightly defined the Eucharistic Bread as a medicine of immortality, an antidote to death.” (EDE 18)

5. “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 plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of the new heavens and a new earth (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, **our sense of responsibility for the world today.**” (EDE 20)

“Proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes (1 Cor 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely Eucharistic. It is this fruit of a transfigured existence and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with the Gospel which splendidly illustrates the eschatological tension inherent in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the Christian life as a whole: Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:20)” (EDE 20)

7. THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

“Eucharist is apostolic, for it is celebrated in conformity with the faith of the Apostles.” (EDE 27)

“The Eucharist also expresses this sense of apostolicity. As the Second Vatican Council 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.** For this reason , the Roman Missal prescribes that only the priest should recite the Eucharistic Prayer, while the people participate in faith and in silence.” (EDE 28)

“The expression repeatedly employed by the Second Vatican Council, according to which the ministerial priest, acting in the person of Christ, brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice, was already firmly rooted in papal teaching. As I have pointed out on other occasions, the phrase **in persona Christi** means more than offering ‘in the name of ‘ or ‘ in the place of ‘ Christ. In persona means in 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.

The ministry of priests who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders, in the economy of salvation chosen by Christ, makes clear that the Eucharist which they

**We remember how you loved us to your death
And still we celebrate for You are with us here.
And we believe that we shall see you when you come
In your glory Lord. We remember, we celebrate, we
believe.**

**Here a million wounded souls are yearning
Just to touch You and be healed.
Gather all your people and hold them to your heart.**

**Now we recreate your love
We bring the bread and wine to share a meal.
Sign of grace and mercy and presence of the Lord.**

**Christ, the Father's great AMEN
To all the hopes and fears of every heart,
Peace beyond all telling and freedom from all fear.**

**See the face of Christ revealed
In every person standing by your side
Gift to one another, and temples of your love.**

OUR PRIESTLY LIFE AND MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

We are a priestly people because Christ associates us to his priesthood. Our mediation with Jesus is first of all, a mediation of life. The universal vocation to holiness finds its place in this priestly perspective. Then there is the mediation of witness by which we are a prophetic people. The missionary mandate flows from our being a prophetic people. Hence there comes the universal responsibility for the spreading of the Gospel.

Lastly, there is the mediation of the secular character of our Christian vocation. By this we fulfill our call to be a kingly people and it is expressed by the universal task to bring all created realities to God. The prophetic and kingly dimensions are like subordinate functions of the priestly nature of the people of God.

These are the guidelines for the development of a spirituality of our baptismal priesthood.

1. The Priesthood of the Church:

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men and women, they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:4-10).

Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (Acts 2:42-47), should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1).

They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who ask a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs (3 Pet :15)”.

The teaching of Vatican II about the common priesthood of the faithful is summed up and developed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. 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.

“Thus with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation, the baptized share in the same mission of Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour-Messiah”.

N. 13: CL

“He who was born of the Virgin Mary, the carpenter’s Son- as he was thought to be – Son of the living God (confessed by Peter), has come to make us ‘a kingdom of priests’. The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of the mystery of this power and

of the fact that the mission continues in the Church. Everyone, the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission”.

The lay 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 (cf. Rom 12:1,2). 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 (cf. 1 Pt 2:5).

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

The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist.

It is a participation given to each member of the lay faithful individually, in as much as each is one of the many who form the one Body of the Lord: in fact Jesus showers his gifts upon the Church which is his Body and his Spouse. In such a way individuals are sharers in the threefold mission of Christ in virtue of their being members of the Church, as St. Peter clearly teaches, when he defines the baptized as “ a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9).

Precisely because it derives from Church communion the sharing of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ requires that it be lived and realized in communion and for the increase of communion itself.

Saint Augustine 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 priesthood”.

N. 14 CL

2. A Traditional view and understanding: the Fathers of the Church.

It is amazing to see 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, non only in the sentence of Saint Augustine quoted above, but in the following passages taken from Origen and Saint Leo the Great.

We see in them well developed **a priestly spirituality of the faithful**. The emphasis on the ordained minister is not yet there. It will appear especially after the Reformation has 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 the seminary 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 the shadows 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 what we consider a modern conquest, was already present so beautifully in the tradition as the two 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)*

“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 yourselves 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 he 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 which 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)

3. The Mediation of life:

The essence of Christ's priesthood is mediation. The first aspect of this mediation is the mediation of life. This presents different elements that we are going to illustrate with passages from the Bible, the NT. It is based on faith because it belongs to the realm of supernatural life.

It therefore 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, therefore a sacrifice which resembles the one of the Cross.

We are priests because we offer spiritual sacrifices, i. e. sacrifices embraced in the power and with the grace of the Holy Spirit. The shedding of blood is no longer requested, it was abolished once and for all by the 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 been rediscovered by the spirituality and theology of the 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*).

“We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.

N.16: CL

I. Based on Faith:

Heb 11:1-4

“Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen. It was for faith that our ancestors were commended.

It is by faith that we understand that the world was created by one word from God, so that no apparent cause can account for the things we can see.

It was because of his faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, and for that he was declared to be righteous when God made acknowledgement of his offerings. Though he is dead, he still speaks by faith”.

Hebrews 12:1-4

“With so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then, should throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings so easily, and keep running steadily in the race we have started. **Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, he endured the cross,** disregarding the shamefulness of it, and from now on has taken his place at the right of God's throne. Think of the way he stood such opposition from sinners and then you will not give up for want of courage. In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of death”.

II. Call to Conversion:

Romans 12:2

“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 thing to do”.

1 Peter 1:13-16

“Free your minds, then, of encumbrances, control them, and put your trust in nothing but the grace that will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. Do not behave in the way that you liked to before you learn the truth; make a habit of obedience: be holy in all you do, since it is the Holy One who has called you, and scripture says: Be holy, for I am holy”.

III. Call to Love:

Roman 12:3-13

“Do not let your love be a pretence, but sincerely prefer good to evil. Love each other as much as brothers should, and have a profound respect for each other. Work for the Lord with untiring effort and with great earnestness of spirit. If you have hope, this will make you cheerful. Do not give up if trials come; and keep on praying. If any of the saints are in need you must share with them; and you should make hospitality your special care”.

1 Peter 1:22-25

“You have been obedient to the truth and purified your souls until you can love like brothers, in sincerity; let your love for each other be real and from the heart- your new birth was not from any mortal seed but from the everlasting word of the living and eternal God. All flesh is grass and its glory like the wild flower’s. The grass withers, the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. What is this word? It is the Good News that has been brought to you.

IV. Offer Yourself in Sacrifice:

Rom 12:1

“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”.

1 Peter 1:18-21

“Remember, the ransom that was paid to free you from the useless way of life your ancestors handed down was not paid in anything corruptible, neither in silver nor gold, but in the precious blood of a lamb without spot or stain, namely Christ; who, though known since before the world was made, has been revealed only in our time, the

end of the ages, for your sake. Through him you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory for that very reason-so that you would have faith and hope in God”.

Ephesians 5:1-2

“Try, then, to imitate God, as children of his that he loves, and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God”.

4. Mediation of witness:

Operari sequitur esse (Our actions follow our nature/being). Our living in a priestly attitude soon becomes expressed in the way we act, speak and relate. It is first of all the 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 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 (**Kerigma**). We are witnesses of all that has taken place through the Incarnation and Redemption in order to call all the peoples 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*).

5. The mediation of the “secular realities” or secularity.

“The newness of the Christian life is the foundation and title for equality among all the baptized in Christ, for all the members of the People of God: “As members, they share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ, they have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity”.

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** which sets a person apart without, however, bringing about a separation from the ministerial priesthood or from men and women religious. The Second Vatican Council has described **this manner of life as the “secular character”**: **The secular character is properly that of the lay faithful”**.

N. 15: CL

Pius XII once stated: “The Faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the front lines 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, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the head of all, and the Bishops in communion with him. These are the Church...”

Precisely with this in mind the Synod Fathers said: “**The secular character of the lay faithful** is not therefore to be defined only in a sociological sense, but most **especially in a theological sense**. The term secular must be understood in 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 the celibate life, in a family, in a profession and in the various activities of society”.

N. 15: CL

CONCLUSION :

1. THE STARTING POINT: THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST:

Neither the baptismal nor the ministerial priesthood is **the starting point** for a right comprehension of the priesthood. The reason is because the only true and proper priest of the New Testament is **Christ, because unique and unrepeatable is the mediation between God and humankind that only he can offer**. Jesus is at the same time priest and victim, the one who offers the sacrifice and the one who is offered and his sacrifice like his priesthood is not at all ritual, but it is so much vital that it constitutes a *unicum* so singular that doesn’t need any addition to complete it.

2. THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD:

The priesthood of Christ is radically different from the priesthood of the OT. Jesus did not belong to the priestly tribe (Levi) but he was a member of the tribe of Judas. Jesus was a layman, a pious Israelite. But we must recognize him as priest because he has accomplished a work of mediation between Humanity and God and occupies now the position of mediator. His mediation has a new content because it happened not in ritual terms (a sacrifice/victim is distinct from the priest), but in personal terms (the sacrifice/victim is the same as the priest) as an act of perfect obedience to the Father (Heb 5:8-9; 10:4-10) and perfect solidarity with us, Humankind (Heb 2:4-18).

3. THE SPIRITUAL SACRIFICE:

Jesus is High Priest of the NT non because of the blood of bulls and goats, but because of the sacrifice of his life offered once and for all. Because of this, after him, we do not need any other sacrificial worship. This is the reason why in the Christian community, **the spiritual sacrifice**, i.e. done under the influence of the Holy Spirit, takes

the place of the **sacrificial worship** (il sacrificio cultuale). The spiritual sacrifice, as imitation of Christ, following the example of Christ, consists in mutual love (Eph 5:2), in the gift of one's life as "sacrifice holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1; Phil 2:17; 2Tim 4:6). Such a sacrifice belongs to all the believers, and cannot be delegated to some cult officials. The participation in Christ's priesthood does not come from imitating Christ's example (moral commitment does not in itself make of our life a priestly act, "a sacrifice pleasing to God"); but especially our union with Christ, in whom human nature is forever assumed into the person of the Son "always active in interceding for us" (Hebr 7:25) with the Father. Only by our union with the Son of God made man we are all given the possibility of entering into a new relationship with God and become, according to the expression of the Church Fathers: **Sons in the Son.**

4. PARTAKERS OF CHRIST'S PRIESTLY DYNAMISM IN THE SPIRIT:

United to Christ, the faithful are partakers of the dynamism of Christ's sacrificial offering: because of being one body with Him, the faithful are united to Christ's sacrifice by means of the offering of themselves and their activities. All this is possible because of the gift of the Spirit. The paschal event becomes ours by means of the Holy Spirit. Through baptism the faithful enter into the paschal dynamism of the offering of self so that in Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit, they become a fully priestly people. From this point of view, we cannot identify the Baptismal Priesthood with the priesthood of only the lay faithful, even the ministerial priest are first of all faithful and consequently members of the priestly people and the very ministerial priesthood is meant to be at the service of the Baptismal Priesthood of all and from within it.

5. THE SPECIFICITY OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY:

The faithful, in order to exercise their priesthood towards the world for which they have **to be transparence of Christ**, every day on their turn have the need of meeting their Lord in his authentic word, in the breaking of the bread of His presence and in the fraternal love of a community in which the different gifts coming from the one Spirit may be discerned and orderly put at the service of the common good.

The ministerial priesthood or the priesthood of the pastors is a real and true **service of sacramental representation of Christ on behalf of the community and in front of it.** Assuming the figure of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest (*In persona Christi*), the ministerial priests bring to perfection the spiritual sacrifice of all the faithful, as they celebrate, together with them, as presiders, the memorial of Christ's sacrifice.

We find therefore the essential difference between the two forms of priesthood in the specific service to the life of faith of the faithful that the ministerial priesthood renders to the Baptismal One by means of the word, the sacraments and the pastoral guidance, so that the people of God may keep their unity with their Head and Lord.

It is interesting, in this context, to consider the terms by which the letter to the Ephesians characterizes the specific function of the ordained ministry: "To enable (make able, fit, capable, prepared *-idonei-*) the saints to fulfill their ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). This the ordained ministers do by assuring and symbolizing the vital link with the apostolic succession and especially by enabling the

SPIRITUALITY OF THE SACRED HEART

(This is a personal enquiry about the sources of the devotion to the Sacred heart of Jesus. It was meant as a preparation to the study of the peculiarities of this devotion in Saint Daniel Comboni (Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ, 2015)

Introduction

It is a special form of devotion to the Word Incarnate that focuses attention on the physical heart of Jesus Christ as the symbol of his redemptive love. Every form of cult rendered to Christ's humanity has for its ultimate and total object the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the God-man Christ in his concrete totality.

In the devotion to the Sacred Heart, the special object is Jesus' physical heart of flesh as the true natural symbol of his threefold love: the human love, sensible and spiritual (infused supernatural charity), and the divine love of the Word Incarnate. In and through adoration of the physical heart the threefold love is adored and ultimately the Person of the Word.

The Heart of Jesus symbolizes the center of Christ's humanity. It is the locus of his affectivity, freedom and consciousness, the place where he surrendered to the mystery of God and of his vocation as mediator and redeemer. It is an unambiguous symbol of love. Devotion to the Sacred Heart as a means of developing a personal relationship with Jesus has taken several forms in the history of Christian spirituality.

The Sacred Heart in the Bible

The cult to the Sacred Heart does not depend, on its substance, on private revelations, even if they have contributed to the spreading of the devotion, but has its roots in revelation i.e. in the Bible and in the Church tradition. This is why Pius XII called the devotion to the Sacred Heart the most perfect expression of the Christian religion and of strict obligation for all the faithful.

Its **essential elements** are two:

1. The physical heart of Jesus, hypostatically united to the person of the Word of God;
2. The infinite love/charity towards humankind.

In the O.T., wonderful pages sing the love of God for humanity, especially the poor, the downtrodden, the lowly and the suffering.

In the N. T., Jesus is the absolute and personal revelation of the love of God the Father, the definitive Covenant with humanity. This New Covenant is no longer written on stone tablets or sealed with the blood of lambs or calves, but sealed on the cross, when "the

Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”(John 1:29) draws to himself the whole of humanity and consecrates them in unity (Hebr 9:18-28; 10:1-17; John 12:32). The Roman soldier pierced the side of Jesus and there came out the blood of redemption and the water of spiritual regeneration, opening, through the door of life, the way of access to the Father.

These are the **classic passages** that found the cult of the Sacred Heart in the New Testament:

- John 19: 31-37 The soldier pierces Jesus’ heart
- John 7: 37-39 From his breast shall flow fountains of living water
- John 13: 23-25 The beloved disciples reclines on Jesus’ breast

The Sacred Heart in the Tradition

The Fathers of the Church saw in the outpouring of blood and water from the pierced side of Jesus on the cross the origin of the Church.

In the Middle Ages, Christians practiced a devotion to the five wounds of Jesus, in particular to his pierced side, and then more specifically to his heart. St. Bernard wrote: “The heart has been wounded so that through the visible wound we may behold the invisible wound of love”. Very remarkable is the experience of the mystics like St. Gertrude the Great. In the account of her tenth revelation, Julian of Norwich records a vision of the heart of Jesus split in two. Catherine of Siena speaks of an exchange of hearts with Jesus.

In the 17th century the devotion started becoming popular in Western Europe. Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales wrote often about the heart of Jesus. John Eudes spoke of the three loves in the Heart of Jesus and promoted the institution of the Feast of the Heart of Jesus (1672). He is considered by Pius XII as the initiator, teacher and apostles of the liturgical cult of the Sacred Heart.

The devotion took off with the contribution of Margaret Mary Alacoque, a French sister of the Visitation, who claimed to have received visions of the Sacred Heart, in her convent at Paray-le-Monial, between 1673 and 1675, telling her to encourage frequent Communion, communion on the first Friday of every month, a Holy Hour on Thursday, and the annual celebration of the Feast of the Sacred Heart. Jesus told her: “Here is the heart that has loved humanity so much and is repaid with ingratitude”. The element of reparation of the offenses committed against Divine Love especially, in the Blessed Sacrament, is prominent with Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. She was helped by the Jesuits, especially her Spiritual Director Fr. Claude la Colombière. The devotion became very popular and was helped by the devotional practices and the images of the Sacred Heart.

The 12 Promises of our Lord for souls devoted to his Sacred Heart

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.

3. I will comfort them in all their afflictions.
4. I will be their secure refuge during life and above all in death.
5. I will abundantly bless all their undertakings.
6. Sinners shall find in my Heart the source and the infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall rise to great perfection.
9. I will bless the homes in which the image of my Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honored.
10. I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.
11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names eternally written in my Heart.
12. In the excess of the mercy of my Heart, I promise that my all-powerful love will grant to all those who will receive Holy Communion on the first Friday for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance. They will not die in my displeasure, no without receiving the Sacraments, and my Heart will be their secure refuge in that last hour.

The liturgical Feast of the Sacred Heart was instituted in 1856 by Pius IX; the world was consecrated to the Sacred Heart by Leo XIII in 1899 and in 1956, Pius XII wrote the encyclical letter *Haurietis Aquas*, giving a biblical and theological foundation to the devotion.

The Sacred Heart in Theology

According to *Haurietis aquas*, **the complete and adequate object** of the cult to the Sacred Heart is the physical heart of Jesus, as the natural symbol of his love and of his whole affective life. Although the heart is not the organ of love, every love experience reverberates in the physical heart or has repercussions in it, vibrate in it.

The heart then recalls **the three loves** of the blessed person of the incarnate Word:

1. First of all and more directly the heart is the symbol of his human love by which he loves as our brother;
2. Then of his infused spiritual love, fruit of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5);
3. Eventually, of his divine love as the Incarnate Word (1 John 4:8).

These three loves, in the person of Jesus, are not simply co-existing, but they are closely inter-twined in virtue of the hypostatic union that unites the two natures (Human and Divine) in the one person of the Word. Therefore, the intimate connection between divine and human love is such that Jesus' love becomes for us the love of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Setting off from the physical heart of Jesus, we are lifted up gradually to the contemplation of the very divine love common to the Divine Persons.

As the body is the symbol of the soul, in the same way the physical heart of Christ is symbol of the whole person of the Incarnate Word and the devotion to the heart of Christ is nothing else but the encounter with a person, an interpersonal relationship with the Son of God made man.

The Sacred Heart in our life.

We can distinguish three different aspects:

- *The devotional one*: with exercises of prayer (adoration, reparation, consolation).
- *The theological one*: we share in the dynamic love of the Heart of the Good Shepherd, especially for the poor, the unfortunate and the sick.
- *The mystical stage*: we share in the piercing of the Heart of the Good Shepherd. This is the apex of our sharing in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus and in his commitment.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus and the wisdom of the heart

To learn the wisdom of the heart we look at the Sacred Heart of Jesus. There are three dimensions in Christ's love:

1. Total consecration to God, his Father: **a Filial Love**
2. Total dedication to humanity: **a Brotherly Love**
3. Full involvement in human history: **an Redeeming (Apostolic) Love**

It was through the human heart of Christ that our salvation was achieved; it is the Blessed Humanity of Jesus that is the sacrament of our salvation.

“By his incarnation, Jesus, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human love he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin” (GS, 22)

“The redemption of the world, this tremendous happening by which humanity is reconciled, creation is renewed, is, first of all, the fullness of love and justice in the heart of the only begotten Son that then is destined to become fullness of love and justice in our heart” (Redemptor Hominis, #9).

The filial, brotherly and apostolic love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus becomes sacrificial love when he accepts the ultimate consequences of his love for us when faced by evil. The Pierced Heart of the Good Shepherd is also a statement of missionary methodology; there are no shortcuts to the spreading of the Gospel, but the vulnerability of loving and being loved.

The heart of the missionary must be like the Sacred Heart of Jesus: completely surrendered to the dynamics of loving and accepting love; the risk, the challenge, the mystique, the vulnerability. St. Bernard writes: “One of the worst evil to which the person can succumb is to be without affection”.

At the end of the day, it is always the beauty of people that we share, contemplate and enjoy, because missionary vocation and missionary experience do not exist in a

