

Neocatechumenal Way

Catechetical Directory
for Teams of Catechists

Volume 1

Phase of Conversion or Initial Catecheses

*Notes taken from tape-recordings
of meetings held by Kiko and Carmen
with teams of catechists from Madrid
in February 1972 and revised in 1999*

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PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
PRO LAICIS
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DECREE

With the decree of May 11, 2008, the Pontifical Council for the Laity approved in a definitive manner the Statute of the Neocatechumenal Way.

The Neocatechumenal Way acts according to the lines proposed by the initiators, contained in the Statute and in the thirteen volumes that bear the title Catechetical directory of the Neocatechumenal Way (see Statute art. 2, 2o), namely:

- Vol. 1: Phase of conversion or initial catecheses.
- Vol. 2: First scrutiny.
- Vol. 3: Convivence: "Shema."
- Vol. 4: Second scrutiny.
- Vol. 5: Initiation to prayer.
- Vol. 6: "Traditio."
- Vol. 7: "Re-Traditio."
- Vol. 8: "Reditio."
- Vol. 9: "Our Father – 1st part."
- Vol. 10: "Our Father – 2nd part."
- Vol. 11: Our Father – Conclusion."
- Vol. 12: "Election – 1st part."
- Vol. 13: "Election – Intermediate and final parts."

These studied volumes of the Catechetical directory have been revised by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith from 1997 to 2003 and opportunely corrected with references to the Catechism of the Catholic Church inserting the themes before each catechesis.

Recently, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, having once again examined the results of the above-mentioned study, with the end of giving a greater security to the acting of the Neocatechumenal Way, and also to offer a doctrinal guarantee to all the pastors of the Church, has seen it opportune to give the Pontifical Council for the Laity – as the Dicastery which follows this ecclesial reality- the responsibility of giving a special approval to the volumes of the Catechetical directory of the Neocatechumenal Way (see the Letter of November 20, 2010, Prot. N. 36/75 -33843).



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
PRO LAICIS

Therefore:

In the light of articles 131 and 133, § 1 and § 2, of the apostolic Constitution Pastor Bonus on the Roman Curia and article 2, 2o of the Statute of the Neocatechumenal Way, the Pontifical Council for the Laity having duly consulted with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, approves the publication of the Catechetical directory as a valid and binding support for the catechesis of the Neocatechumenal Way. The volumes of the Catechetical directory have been properly authenticated by the Pontifical Council for the Laity and sealed copies have been deposited in its archives.

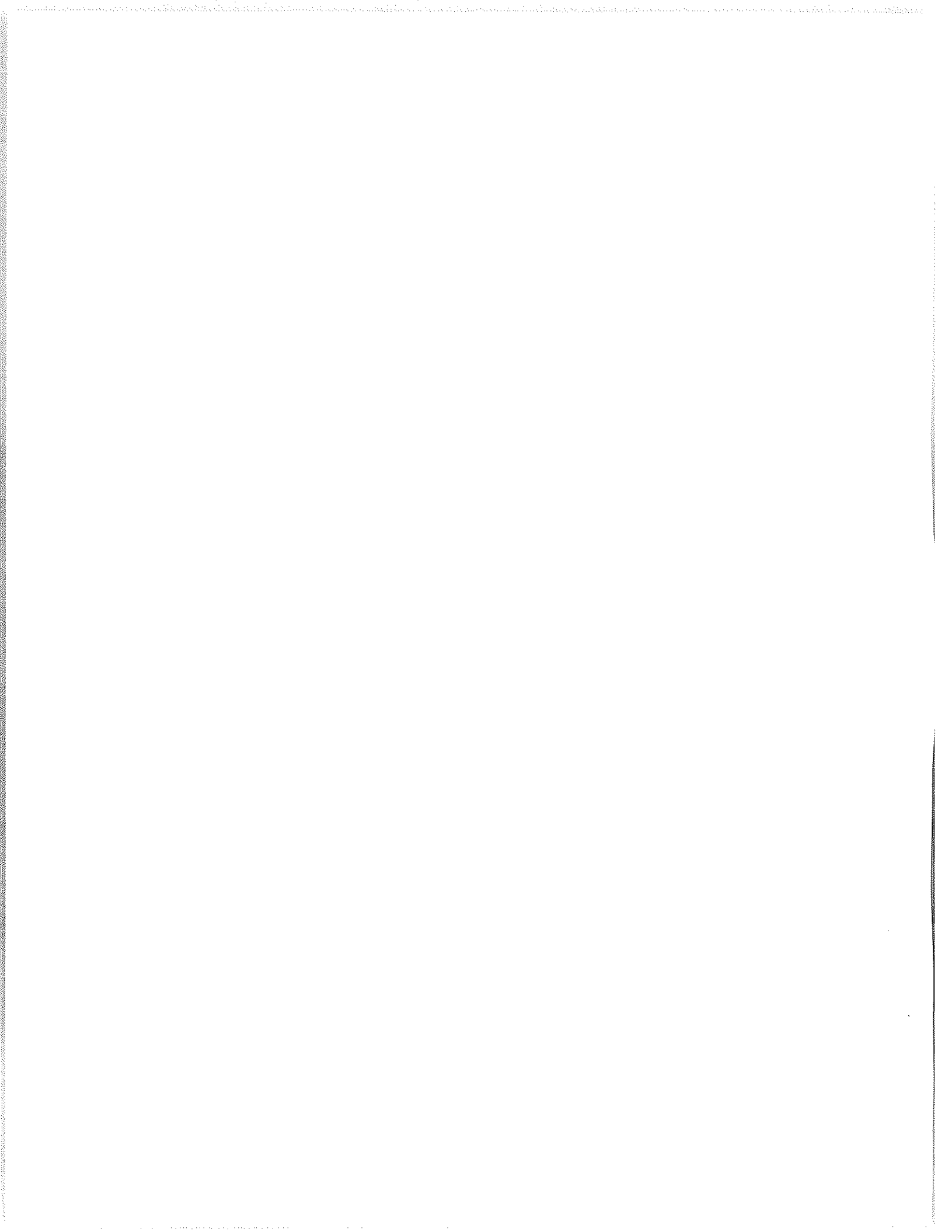
Given in the Vatican, December 26, 2010, feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

+ *Dr. Clemens*
✠ Josef Clemens
Segretario

Sl. Card. Ryłko
Stanisław Card. Ryłko
Presidente

SUMMARY

	<i>Page</i>
Introductory note	i
 <u>CATECHESSES</u>	
Day 1	Introduction 1
Day 2	Pastoral of evangelisation 17
Day 3	The signs of faith 17
Day 4	Desacralization, dechristianization, crisis of faith 34
Day 5	The mission of the Church 62
Day 6	Who is God for you? 84
Day 7	Who am I? 99
Day 8	The kerygma (part one) 117
	The kerygma (part two)
	A. Paris 1978 140
	B. Madrid 1972 158
Day 9	The sacrament of Penance
	A. Catechesis 171
	B. Questionnaire on Penance 192
Day 10	Celebration of the sacrament of Penance 203
Day 11	The people's experiences 223
Day 12	Abraham 225
Day 13	Exodus 244
Day 14	Questionnaire on the Word of God 262
Day 15	Celebration of the Word of God 285
	Handing over of the Bible
 <u>FINAL CONVIVENCE</u>	
Friday	Celebration of the Lucernarium 297
Saturday	Questionnaire on the Eucharist 306
	Catechesis on the Eucharist (I): The Paschal "Seder" 307
	Catechesis on the Eucharist (II): History of the Eucharist 337
Sunday	Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount 365
	Catechesis on the Servant of Yahweh (I) 372
	Catechesis on the Servant of Yahweh (II) and catechesis on the Way 393
	List of biblical themes for the precatechumenate 405
Appendix 1:	Meeting with the catechists before beginning the catechesis 406
Appendix 2:	Meeting with the catechists about visits to the communities before the first passage 420



INTRODUCTORY NOTE

For 25 years these notes, the *Guidelines for teams of catechists for the stage of conversion*, have been the instrument that has helped the teams of catechists of the Neocatechumenal Way, particularly for the preparation of the initial catecheses. They are the transcription of tape-recordings of catecheses given by us to teams of catechists from Madrid, in February-April 1972, and are completed by several catecheses, celebrations and the final convivence that we did in Barcelona, in November-December 1971.

In 1977, after having examined these *Guidelines*, at the request of the "Sacred Congregation for the Clergy", Father G. Groppo, S.D.B., gave them a very positive evaluation and said that the novelty of these catecheses and the fundamental criterion for their interpretation consisted in the fact that they are the oral expression of a lived experience of faith and conversion and that therefore what is involved here is an existential language, whose truth is not to be found in the individual phrase but in the general context: an intensely lived experience does not lend itself to neat theoretic formulas but is always expressed in a rather chaotic way, with frequent repetitions, making use of paradox, expressing itself in images rather than concepts.

Father Groppo concluded his evaluation with these words: "I now intend to highlight another aspect of these catecheses, or rather, of this Neocatechumenal Way. As a scholar of the history of early catechesis, I must say that the endeavor of Kiko [and Carmen] to put the catechumenate into effect has been successful. Their experience has given them an insight into the profoundly valid content of this institution of the Church of the first three centuries and has permitted them to translate it into a structure which, while not retracing the ancient one, takes up its most important elements and inserts them into a new context: that of the conversion of those who, though having been baptized, have never made a personal option of faith. In this process, which takes time, these baptized members of the Neocatechumenal Communities are helped to make their fundamental option of faith in a climate of community; to open themselves to the action of the Holy Spirit who introduces them to an understanding and acceptance of an evangelical radicalism, gradually initiating them in an experiential way to the Word of God and to the Sacraments of Christian conversion (Penance) and of the Eucharist. I find all this very positive. (*Protocol 156375*, September 12, 1977)

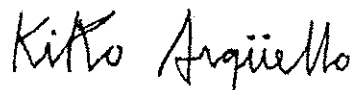
In this volume is presented, as the first part of the *Catechetical Directory of the Neocatechumenal Way*, which consists of the different stages of the Way, the corrected version of the *Guidelines for teams of catechists for the stage of conversion*, which has been prepared by a Commission appointed by us. The Commission has respected the original language, live and oral, of the text. It has corrected incomplete or less felicitous expressions - which might also have seemed ambiguous -, which were a characteristic of the spoken language or simply due to the not always accurate translation from the original Spanish. In addition, they have taken into account the observations made at the second examination of the *Guidelines* by the Congregation for the Clergy in 1990. Finally, they have added the biblical quotations to which the text refers or which are a help to a better understanding of its meaning.

It only needs to be added that in reviewing the text of the *Guidelines for teams of catechists*, in accordance with the suggestion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, appropriate references to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* have been added. These are not illustrative but normative.


For each catechesis these references are in two parts:

- a) at the beginning there is a panoramic vision of the teaching of the *Catechism* on the theme dealt with in the catechesis; this for the formation of the catechists;
- b) some sections on particular points of the catechesis are given as footnotes.

God has chosen to save the world through the “foolishness” of the preaching (see 1 Cor 1:21). St. Paul himself says to the Romans that his preaching is not based on the persuasive discourse of human wisdom, but on the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and his power, which accompanies the preaching and acts through signs and miracles of conversion in the people who listen (see Rom 2:3-5).



(Kiko Arguello)



(Carmen Hernandez)

Rome, February 2, 1999

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

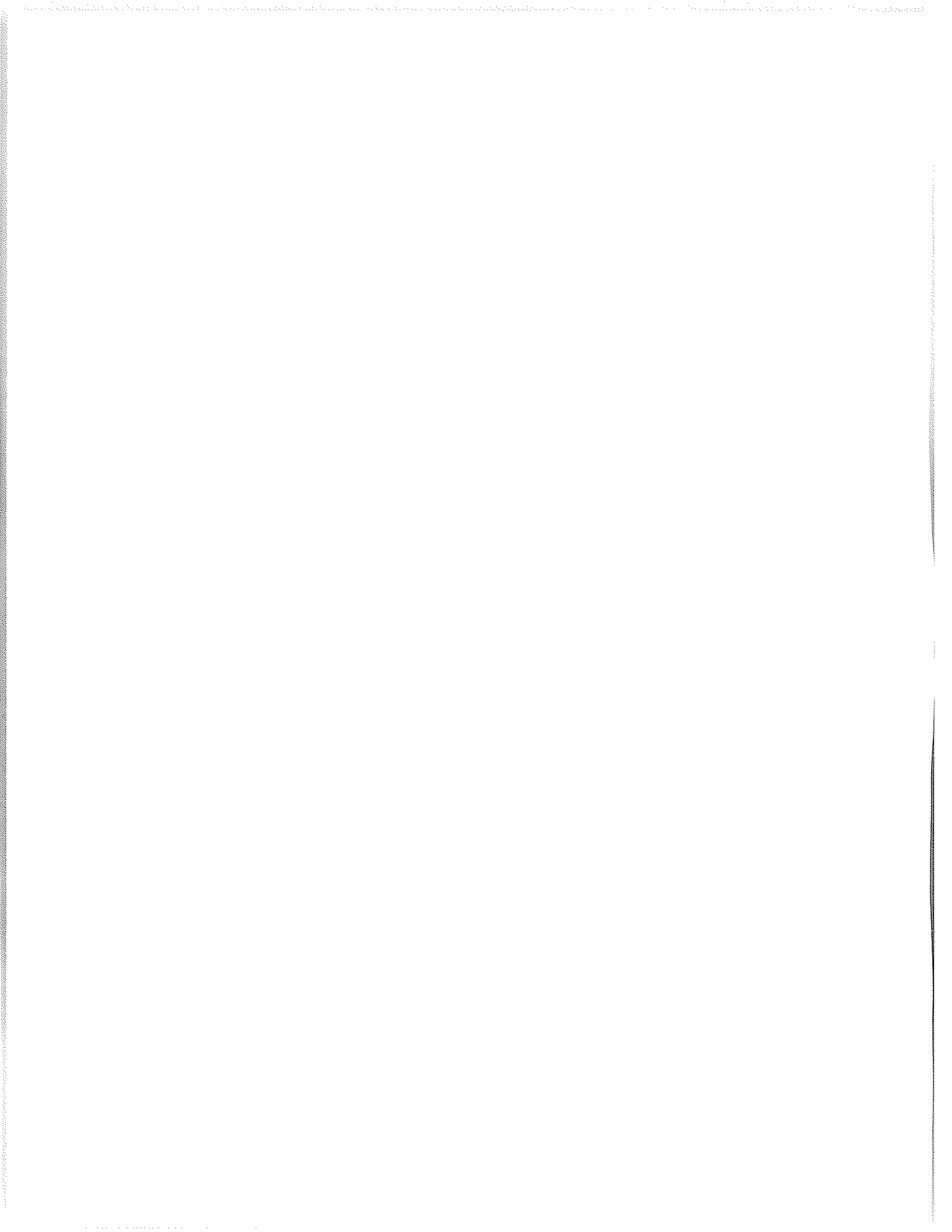
SCHEME OF THE PASSAGES DURING THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY*

The whole of the neocatechumenal process is based on the "tripod":
WORD – LITURGY - COMMUNITY

"It is necessary to form Christian communities like the Holy Family of Nazareth, who live in humility, simplicity and praise, and where the other is Christ"

ANNOUNCE- MENT OF THE KERYGMA	<i>humility</i> PRE CATECHUMENATE		<i>simplicity</i> CATECHUMENATE					<i>praise</i> ELECTION	RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES	<i>"the other is Christ"</i> Adult community: sign for the faraway	
Initial Catechesis											
		"Shema" convivence	1 st initiation to prayer	"Traditio symboli"	"Redditio"	2 nd Initiation to Prayer	Entrusting to the Virgin Mary and act of faithfulness to the Pope	Catechesis and handing over of Our Father	2 nd Convivence of the election	Pilgrimage to Holy land	Parish: "community of communities"
1 st Convivence: birth of the community	1 st scrutiny								1 st Convivence of the Election		

* Each team of catechists, with the presbyter and the parish priest, decides on the length of each stage of the Way, having regard to the point of conversion reached by individuals and communities



FIRST DAYINTRODUCTION

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): The sacrament of Baptism (1212-1284); Christian initiation (1229-33, 1244, 1247, 1285, 1289, 1292, 1306, 1318, 1321-1322), the Catechumenate (1230-1233, 1247-1249).

(Kiko)

On the first day, it's good if the pastor says the initial prayer. This is advisable because if one of you, as yet unknown, stands there in the middle and begins to pray, the people may not understand.

After this, he himself must briefly introduce the rest of you so that the people will know who will be speaking to them. After that you begin the catechesis.

One of the catechists will begin by giving his personal experience. It may be fitting that someone else from the team give their experience also. Tell your experience: how you got to know this Way, how you entered into it and what it means for you today. None of you should introduce himself by saying: "I am already a Christian..." (In the sense of already being completely converted), because this is not the case. All of us are people on a journey, people in continual conversion (see Phil 3:12). Introduce yourself in all truth, without saying that you are better than anyone else.

(Carmen)

In this first catechesis, rather than introducing people, the aim is to present the neocatechumenal Way, explaining where it comes from and to where it leads, so that the people may understand what we will do. The aim, then, is to present the neocatechumenal Way, which is like the way of conversion through which God led the people of Israel throughout all her history. Your own history must remain in the background. What must appear in the foreground is the neocatechumenal Way: how a concrete person had a meeting with God, with his Word that has called him and how in this calling he has found himself with a people, with a community... In other words, the whole neocatechumenal Way should appear, but not in an intellectual manner, but rather interwoven with your concrete life. I say this because, in giving experiences, we run the risk of putting the person in the foreground, whereas it is matter of putting the action of God through the neocatechumenal Way in the foreground.

(Kiko)

One of you, the responsible or the one you think best, gives his personal experience: what has this Way meant in your concrete life? You are a person who has been caught up by this Way. Explain when and how you met it, how your life was before

knowing it and how it is now. This is the first thing you must do in this catechesis. Tell the truth without inventing anything. All of you who are here met this Way in an historic moment of your life. And this meeting has meant for you, I imagine, a change. This Way has given you, I believe, something new, explain this. Somehow you don't live anymore as you used to.

(Carmen)

In giving your experience you must bear this in mind: there is not an isolated moment "X" before which God was not present in your life at all, but that there is a moment that enlightens our whole past life. For example, I who am now preaching the Gospel in the parish of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and who once wanted to go to preach in India, see that the promise of preaching the Gospel made to me when I was fifteen is now being fulfilled. For us, this moment was in the shanty town: a moment that enlightened all our past and marked the future. In the light of this particular moment, all your past history acquires meaning. All of you have this moment. To have faith is precisely to enter into the history of salvation and to see that it is fulfilled in your life. The whole history of salvation is always the dynamic of a promise that is fulfilled. In this first catechesis, our life has to remain in the background, to show that the history of every man has a direction.

(Kiko)

But how was this Way born, where does it come from? This is important. So you have to briefly tell the origin of this Way. Talk a little, without going on too much, about Carmen and myself, to explain how this Way was born and how it has arrived to you. Explain how in the shanty town we thought that Jesus Christ could not be an idea but that he had to be useful for something. We saw that to gypsies, to people who were very poor and illiterate, we could not give theories, but rather something very concrete, because Jesus Christ has to be useful also for the poor. Many times Jesus Christ is spoken of to the people without them experiencing anything, nor does Jesus Christ save them from anything. At Palomerias, living with the poor, the Lord brought us to make a catechetical synthesis that enabled us to speak to them of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit acted in those people, who were poor enough to welcome the message of salvation and before our eyes appeared the Church, the visible Body of Jesus Christ risen.

Carmen had been in a missionary institute for eight years and was working in Barcelona trying to form some teams to go to Bolivia. A team left for Bolivia to work there among the Indians while Carmen came to Madrid to look for other people to take to Bolivia. I knew her sister Pilar and through her we met. Carmen had worked as a worker in a factory and as a maid in some homes. In Madrid she came to live in a shack half a kilometer away from where I lived, near the Bunsen factory, and kept on working at cleaning houses. At first, when she met me, she thought that perhaps I could be good for the team for Bolivia.

But when Carmen saw what God was beginning to do among the poor of Palomeras, she was impressed. She had always thought in terms of a community of specially chosen people, of celibate people who do things for others; but she had never thought of a community formed of common, ordinary people, of married people, of poor people. Carmen was not so sure anymore about leaving for Bolivia, to the point that they even came to look for her to ask her what was going on, since she hadn't left yet. She saw how the Holy Spirit was becoming present in a Christian community of very poor people.

We have seen very clearly in all this that this Way which now is developing in the parishes, God gave it to us as a gift through the very poor. This Way was not invented by us. I had the intuition, maybe listening to a speech of John XXIII which spoke about the Church of the poor and that the renewal of the Church would come about from the poor.

Convinced of this and of the fact that Jesus Christ identifies himself with the poor and miserable ones of the earth, I went to live in the shanty town of Palomeras. I did not go there either to teach the people how to read and write, or to do social work, and not even, if you like, to preach the Gospel. I went there to be at the side of Jesus Christ. Charles de Foucauld had given me the formula to live silently in the midst of the poor as a poor man. This man, who was murdered by mistake, had known how to live a silent presence of witness among the poor. He had as an ideal the hidden life that Jesus Christ lived for thirty years, without saying anything, in the midst of men. This was the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld: to live in silence amongst the poor. Foucauld gave me the formula for living out my monastic ideal: to live as a poor man amongst the poor, sharing their home, their work and their life, without asking anything from anyone and without doing anything special. I never thought of setting up a school or a clinic or anything of the sort. I only wanted to be among them, sharing their reality.

Through a maid who was working in my parents' home I had had my first contact with the poor. She had a son in jail for I don't know what. She asked me to go to her home to help her. I saw such great misery that I was horrified. I went to live in her home, trying to help her husband. I met various people: drunkards, beggars, etc. In front of human suffering I was horrified. Among all these people I felt very near Jesus Christ.

When I had to go to Africa to finish my military service, I had already decided that, on returning to Madrid, I would go to live among these people. I desired to be silently in their midst, ready to pray and to see Jesus Christ in them. I was convinced that in the midst of these miserable people there was Jesus Christ crucified.

I went to Palomeras and stayed there for six months alone. People were wondering who I was because they used to see me with a guitar and a Bible. I worked giving drawing classes in a little school in the suburbs. One day, a man called Joaquin came and brought me a heater because it was snowing and it was very cold. I kept warm thanks to the stray dogs that came to sleep at

my place. I was well-known because when I was on my way to work all the dogs followed me. Sometimes when I was at the bus stop waiting for the bus, I had thirty dogs there with me and I didn't know what to do.

Several months went by like this. People were inviting me to eat at their places and, little by little, they were becoming friends of mine. Then a boy who used to beg for alms in the metro stations, a polio victim who walked with two crutches, asked me to let him live with me and he came to stay with me. One day there appeared some juvenile delinquents who were wounded, because they had come to blows in a fight between gangs. They were boys who used to live by stealing. Two of them who were running from the police asked me to let them spend the night at my place to hide, but they never left. This made me suffer very much because all the gang began to come over. They were boys who did drugs and several times some of them tried to kill me when they were drunk.

(Carmen)

I had already had various experiences of this kind before, especially in Barcelona. We lived in Barcelona in the shanty town of Casa Antunez, working like crazy to incarnate ourselves in the poor, thinking that one day we would be able to announce the Gospel. At Palomeras I was impressed by the fact that these people were interested in Jesus Christ. It was a big surprise for us to see that these people who were so poor, who were suffering so much hunger, were interested in the message of the Gospel. I remember that once a certain Joaquin, who previously had worked in the mines, invited me for dinner. Kiko was not there. He said a prayer. I was very much impressed that God and Jesus Christ could be named in such a place.

For six months I had been living near there, among the rag-and-bone men. To get close to these people I had even gone to a dance with a certain Domingo, who was not even a street rag-and-bone man but only a servant of rag-and-bone men. No one paid any attention to this Domingo. He appreciated me very much because I was giving him my attention. I introduced him to Kiko and he went to live with him. One day I went to visit them and they were praying morning prayer...

For me, it was a surprise that Kiko managed to create a milieu and interest people in what he said. I had always heard, in the talks on the renewal of consecrated people, the word "community" used in reference to communities of select people, of people consecrated by vows, of celibate people, called by God to perform a service, a ministry among people (even though already Father Gauthier presented some progress talking about groups of young men and women together). Because of this, in Palomeras it made an enormous impression on me that Kiko, who was speaking all day long about community, called that a community: very weird people; a completely mad girl, a drunkard, a delinquent, etc. They all called that a "community," with such enthusiasm... I was surprised that they talked so much about community. I had spoken a lot about preaching the Gospel, but about community...

What I can tell you is that in that community of Palomeras the Holy Spirit appeared, he came forth. José Agudo is a witness that, among people so wretched, the Holy Spirit was descending. In the prayer there was an enormous sincerity because there everyone's sins were as in a photograph, because they all knew what the other was. I was there several months unable to say a single prayer because in front of the sincerity of those people I felt like a Pharisee. The prayer of Mariano, for example, was impressive because of its sincerity. Those meetings were truly a miracle, for the Holy Spirit was there as a presence you could almost touch.

(Kiko)

They were really poor people. There was a certain Felipe, a tramp, who had seen his father being murdered, a boy totally destroyed. There were two delinquents, a prostitute, some families of gypsies, Joaquin, a drunkard who used to beat his wife and made her life impossible, a lame boy with crutches. They were so poor that they did not defend themselves in front of the Word of God because they had nothing to defend. They were so poor, so poor, that they were believing everything that we were saying to them, that they were believing the Gospel to the letter because they were not "immunized." And because they were believing the Gospel, the Holy Spirit was acting in them. For me the greatest marvel is that a communion, a *koinonia*, began to arise amongst us, among people who, humanly speaking, didn't even look like men.

There I saw how a gypsy, who worked for fifteen days and then didn't work for twenty-five, who used to send his children out everyday to beg for alms half-naked and his wife to sell false gold round the houses, radically change his life. Since he didn't work, he used to come to my shack to listen to me playing the guitar and then to what I was saying. I remember that one day I gave him the little flowers of St. Francis. Who was it who told this man that he had to go to work and send his children to school and not send his wife around like that? Nobody ever told him this. I myself never told him this because I respected him immensely. In the shanty town I never had recourse to moralism, demanding from that people to change their lives. And who was it who made this gypsy start working and send his children to school? THE HOLY SPIRIT. If a man doesn't work and instead lives on the alms his children go to beg for, it is because he doesn't love his children. But if God changes his heart and gives him a heart of love, then he will send his children to school and will start working himself because he will no longer seek his own well-being but the well-being of his children.

Human advancement, the true development of the peoples, is found fundamentally in Jesus Christ, who makes himself present in the Holy Spirit. All this is on a completely different line from a certain social action which is so fashionable now, which wants to develop man before speaking to him about Jesus Christ and the Gospel. As though Jesus Christ were not true man, or as if the Holy Spirit and his grace didn't act in humanity at whatever level of development it finds itself.

I tell you all this so that you can see that God has given this Way as a gift to the poor. Carmen and I have merely been instruments because the Holy Spirit uses concrete persons. All the Scripture is full of personal names because the history of salvation passes through concrete people. Your history, too, passes through concrete persons like myself, Carmen, the brothers of your community. The Holy Spirit doesn't float in the clouds...

Everything you have received was born in the shanty town. The tripod on which the Neocatechumenate is based originated there. The people were asking for a word, they were asking to be told about Jesus Christ. I remember when José Agudo took me to his cave, a dark cave, where all his family was gathered and he said to me, "Speak to them about Jesus Christ." "Me? What can I say to them?" I replied. I knew the conferences of the Cursillos, and I began to give the one about original sin. Then José Agudo's mother, who I suppose was there against her will and was fed up, after I said fifteen words, said to me, "What you are saying is all lies! My father died and never came back home. Have you seen my father? Well, I haven't! Do you know of anyone who has come back from the cemetery? I don't! Surely there is a powerful hand in heaven, but of the other life we know nothing: it's just priests' stuff."

And you know what? Just that morning I had been reading the Acts of the Apostles (see Acts 25:13-22) where it says that Governor Festus tells King Agrippa that he has a prisoner, Paul, and of all the things he told him, he has understood only one thing: there was a man who was killed and now lives. This enlightened me because the witness that this woman was asking for was precisely that of a man who, once brought to the cemetery, would come back and tell us if there is anything on the other side or not. This is the only thing that this woman was willing to believe. In that moment I had an inspiration. Christianity is based on this: a man has come back from death, has really come back from the cemetery and he is alive today!

Among those people who were so poor there arose a liturgy as a response to this Word that was listened to and welcomed. And the Holy Spirit acted in those people causing *koinonia* to be born among them.

In this manner, then, explain how this Way was born in the shanty town and how afterwards they called us to the parishes (Argüelles, Zamora, etc.) and we went from parish to parish in Spain, Portugal and Italy, opening this neocatechumenal Way within the parishes.

(Carmen)

Bear in mind that this Way was never something preconceived but is rather the fruit of a lived experience. In the shanty town Kiko discovered a word that was able to reach the people: a living Kerygma, fruit also of the dialogue with the people. Kiko would open the Bible and ask: "And what does this say to you, concretely?" Thus, there arose a series of questions, like "Who is God for you?" When we went to Argüelles we didn't know anything about the catechumenate. We were announcing Jesus

Christ and that was creating an atmosphere of unity, a community. There, much to our surprise, Baptism appeared before us. Through the failures of Argüelles we discovered the need for a catechumenal way for the rediscovery of Baptism.

Everything arose from experience; these have not been preconceived ideas. Later on, when we read books on the catechumenate, like those of the French scholars, it was for us a confirmation of what God had given us as a gift and manifested in the midst of the poor.

(Kiko)

I want to say some things that are important to safeguard the unity of the neocatechumenal Way. God, whether we like it or not, even if someone might call me presumptuous, is empowering with charisms and services various people who are in this Way. Just today the Pope was saying that the Shepherds must be able to discover and confirm the charisms which arise among the people from the base. This one is a service that God has raised from the base.

We have presented this Way to the Bishops. I think that we were among the first to celebrate the Eucharist under the two species and with the Canon in Spanish. Carmen has always kept in touch with Fr. Farnés. We even went to spend three days of spiritual exercises in the town in Catalonia where he was pastor. Through him we kept up-to-date with the liturgical renewal. This was how, for example, that we discovered that in order to talk of the Eucharist, it was necessary to start from the beginning of the history of salvation, starting with Abraham and continuing then with the Exodus and the Jewish Passover.

(Carmen)

I think that it's fundamental that, through your personal experience and the short exposition of how this Way was born, the catechumenate and especially the Word that summons and opens a way of conversion, should appear.¹ This Word is God himself who has already made himself present in your history and is now enlightening it. This Word is always effective and fulfills itself. That is why we speak so much about the shanty town: because there we saw a powerful Word arising and summoning the people. This Word was God himself creating communion among those people who were so poor. The communion that is created by the Word of God is the community, the Church.

You, too, have been summoned by a powerful Word that has set you on a way, in community; a Word that is creating a body

¹ CCC 1427: Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15.) In the Church's preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion...

out of you. So in this catechesis, both what happened in the shanty town and your own experience give witness to the way that you are going to begin in the parish, which is based on a tripod: Word, Liturgy and Community.

(Kiko)

Then you can explain concretely of what this Way consists. This Way is a postbaptismal catechumenate,² a way of conversion. It begins with the Word of God, the Kerygma, which calls people together and progressively becomes a reality. This Word is an invitation that waits for your answer. This response is given in the liturgy, in the sacraments, in which you answer "Amen" to the Word of God. Here the Church can confirm that your "Amen" is true, that this Word is becoming reality; it goes from being prophetic to being an actualizing reality. And this Word, who is

² CCC 1229: From the time of the apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages. This journey can be covered rapidly or slowly, but certain essential elements will always have to be present: proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and admission to Eucharistic communion.

CCC 1230: This initiation has varied greatly through the centuries according to circumstances. In the first centuries of the Church, Christian initiation saw considerable development. A long period of *catechumenate* included a series of preparatory rites, which were liturgical landmarks along the path of catechumenal preparation and culminated in the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

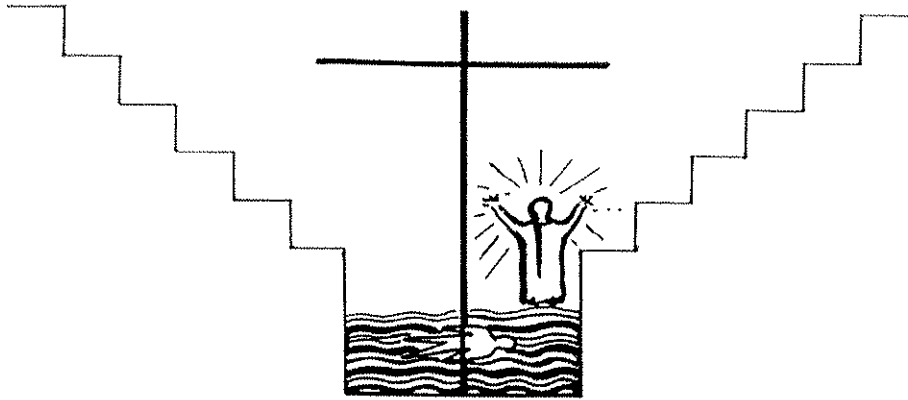
CCC 1231: Where infant Baptism has become the form in which this sacrament is usually celebrated, it has become a single act encapsulating the preparatory stages of Christian initiation in a very abridged way. By its very nature infant Baptism requires a *post-baptismal catechumenate*. Not only is there a need for instruction after Baptism, but also for the necessary flowering of baptismal grace in personal growth...

CCC 1247: Since the beginning of the Church, adult Baptism is the common practice where the proclamation of the Gospel is still new. The catechumenate (preparation for Baptism) therefore occupies an important place. This initiation into Christian faith and life should dispose the catechumen to receive the gift of God in Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.

CCC 1248: The catechumenate, or formation of catechumens, aims at bringing their conversion and faith to maturity, in response to the divine initiative and in union with an ecclesial community. The catechumenate is to be "a formation in the whole Christian life... during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher. The catechumens should be properly initiated into the mystery of salvation and the practice of the evangelical virtues and they should be introduced into the life of faith, liturgy and charity of the People of God by successive sacred rites" (AG 14).

Christ, conqueror of all that divides us, creates *koinonia*, produces charity and creates the community.

This Way is a catechumenate. You can make this sketch of the catechumenate: Baptism is like a descent with seven steps which lead to a pool.



In Baptism the corpse of the old man remains buried in the water, which signifies death. In the same way in which Jesus entered into death and was snatched out of it by God like a new, resurrected man, you, by going into and coming out of the water, die and rise and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are fulfilled in you.³

The one who comes out of the water is a new man, the risen Jesus Christ himself, the man born of the Holy Spirit.

The catechumenate is this descent down into the waters of Baptism. It is a way of conversion to touch your poverty and your impotence with your own hands, so that you may know your deep reality of sin and misery.

Since the people in the shanty town were truly poor and their sins were visible to everyone, they immediately welcomed this word of salvation and the Holy Spirit acted in them. We, instead, are people who are immunized and twisted. We need a long period of time to become really aware of our poverty.

In this neocatechumenal Way a community appears as a Body in which the Church is made visible, becomes concrete and is fulfilled. The Church is the sign visible to the world of the

³ CCC 1213: Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*) and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word" (Roman Catechism II, 2, 5).

Mystery of Easter, of Jesus Christ risen from death. Here it is necessary to briefly announce the Kerygma.⁴

Jesus Christ is the one sent by the Father to destroy all the barriers that separate men and to form *koinonia*, communion among men, the Church. What are the barriers that separate men? Age: there are young and old; each one thinks in his own way; that is why the young have their own groups apart, because the old are all out of fashion... The young people's ideas destroy the old people and vice versa. Jesus Christ comes to break down this barrier and to make it so that the young and the old may feel like brothers and sisters. Other barriers: men and women; poor and rich; intelligent and unintelligent. Jesus Christ comes to break down all these barriers in order to create communion among us in his Blood, not through any merit of our own, but through the merit of his death and resurrection, which is given to us gratis through the Holy Spirit.

But what is the fundamental barrier that lies beneath all the others? What is it that deep down separates men? THE FEAR OF DEATH. When a person destroys me, kills me, I don't accept him because I don't want to die. WE MEN ARE ALL CHOKED BY THE FEAR OF DEATH. BECAUSE OF THIS WE ARE ALL SLAVES TO EVIL (see Heb 2:15). THE LAW SAYS THAT WE HAVE TO LOVE THE OTHER, BUT IF WE LOVE THE OTHER, WE DIE BECAUSE HE DESTROYS US AND WE DON'T WANT TO DIE. BECAUSE OF THIS WE CANNOT LOVE: WE HAVE AN INTERNAL DICHOTOMY THAT PRODUCES IN US A CONSTANT DISSATISFACTION. I CANNOT CROSS OVER TO THE OTHER, LOVE HIM, BECAUSE THE FEAR I HAVE OF DEATH PREVENTS ME FROM DOING SO.

WHY AM I AFRAID OF DEATH? BECAUSE I HAVE HAD AN EXPERIENCE OF SIN. SIN IS AN EXPERIENCE OF DEATH AT AN ONTIC LEVEL, THAT IS, AT A DEEP EXISTENTIAL LEVEL.

JESUS CHRIST HAS COME AND HAS BEEN RAISED BY THE FATHER FROM AMONG THE DEAD TO BREAK DEATH (see Heb 2:14) AND TO PUT MEN IN COMMUNION.

⁴ CCC 875: "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14-15) No one—no individual and no community—can proclaim the Gospel to himself: "Faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 10:17). No one can give himself the mandate and the mission to proclaim the Gospel. The one sent by the Lord does not speak and act on his own authority, but by virtue of Christ's authority; not as a member of the community, but speaking to it in the name of Christ...

CCC 1122: Christ sent his apostles so that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations" (Lk 24:47). "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). The mission to baptize and so the sacramental mission, is implied in the mission to evangelize, because the sacrament is prepared for by the *word of God and by the faith* which is assent to this word.

AND HOW DOES HE BREAK DEATH IN MEN? BY RISING FROM DEATH. JESUS IS ALIVE AND RISEN AND GIVES HIS OWN SPIRIT GRATIS TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM.

Later on we will explain the Kerygma in a better way, but for the moment I think that it is good to mention this.

Be aware that the people to whom you are speaking have an inadequate theology. People do not understand the human nature of Jesus very well. This has been the case from very early times. Because Jesus is God, they do not understand why he has to rise again, since God cannot die. For the people, Jesus as God is useful only for this: to show how much he has loved us by suffering for us. For if someone suffers for you, he is showing you, in a way that is very primitive and psychological, that he loves you. Because of this: the cross and the blood. How much Christ did suffer for us, for you and for me! But people cannot understand the death and resurrection. The people, for example, cannot understand when they listen in the readings at Mass that God has raised Jesus. To many this doesn't make any sense. And nevertheless, all the Kerygmas say this: "This one, whom you have killed, God has raised him up" (see Acts 4:10).

There is a book by Congar about these practical heresies of the common people. One is monophysitism, which says that Jesus Christ has only the divine nature; the human nature of Jesus is a scandal for many. They cannot conceive that Jesus is truly man; they think that he has only a human appearance. Common people cannot conceive that Jesus is a man like you and me.

Because of this confusion that people have in their heads, they don't comprehend the paschal mystery. If Jesus is not truly man, neither his death nor his resurrection have any sense. Jesus was truly man: his divinity eclipsed itself (see Phil 2:5-8). For the people, Jesus knew everything and had the power of divination. He was a kind of wizard because since he was God...

He was a man like us and God was acting in him, performing signs so that it may be manifest that he was the Sent One of God, the Chosen One of God, for every prophet in Israel had to prove that he came from God, otherwise he was a false prophet. And he proves it with facts, performing miracles and uttering words that are fulfilled. The Father had to act in him to confirm that he was his envoy, anointed by God with the Holy Spirit to fulfill his mission. This is why Jesus says (see Jn 10:37-38): "If you don't believe me, believe at least the works of my Father; he is the one who gives witness with his deeds that what I say is truth." And he cured men blind from birth. And the blind man asked: "Have you ever seen curing a man blind from birth?" (see Jn 9:32). Nevertheless the Pharisees don't accept it and even though the parents of the blind man testify that he had been blind from birth and now sees, they don't say: "We really are in front of a wonder from God" and convert, but they shut him up and drive him out... without converting.

Here you must proclaim: BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I ANNOUNCE TO YOU A GOOD NEWS: THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS VERY NEAR TO YOU (see Mt 10:7), but the door of the Kingdom is very small (see Lk 13:24). Only the little ones and those who make themselves like them,

the poor, can enter through it (see Mt 19:14; 5:3).⁵ THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMES HERE WITH US.

The catechumenate is a time to make ourselves poor, a time to experience that God from our poverty, from our death, draws out the resurrection; that God is not comfortably sitting on a sofa, watching you while you are rotting in your sins, you are oppressed and enslaved, but that God has sent for your problems, for your concrete sufferings, A SAVIOR.

The first thing that you must experience and accept is that you are a poor person who needs salvation.

To explain this we will now give two catecheses from the Gospel. (This is relatively new, because before we didn't do them. Perhaps for many they will be a novelty, but it is very interesting to do them).

The first one is the story of the blind man of Jericho (Mk 10:46-52). This is a catechesis that explicates what the catechumenate is.

There was a blind man who was staying at the gate of the city begging for alms. Hearing the murmur of many people who were approaching, he asked: "What's going on?" And they told him: "It is Jesus who is coming." As soon as he heard that it was Jesus, the blind man started shouting: "JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE PITY ON ME." The blind man shouted so much that the disciples of Jesus told him to be quiet because he was annoying with that terrible noise. Jesus continues without paying any attention to him, while the blind man shouts louder and louder. Suddenly Jesus stops and says: "Bring him here." In fact, he had already gone past.

So the disciples go to the blind man and tell him: "Courage, he is calling you." The blind man immediately throws off his cloak and lets himself be led to Jesus. They bring him before Jesus and Jesus asks him: "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replies: "LORD, THAT I MAY SEE!" Jesus tells him: "SEE! YOUR FAITH HAS SAVED YOU." And he saw.

⁵ CCC 544: The kingdom belongs to the poor and lowly, which means those who have accepted it with humble hearts. Jesus is sent to "preach good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18; see 7:22); he declares them blessed, for "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3). To them—the "little ones"—the Father is pleased to reveal what remains hidden from the wise and the learned (see Mt 11:25). Jesus shares the life of the poor, from the cradle to the cross; he experiences hunger, thirst and privation (see Mt 21:18; Mk 2:23-26; Jn 4:6-7; 19:28; Lk 9:58). Jesus identifies himself with the poor of every kind and makes active love toward them the condition for entering his kingdom (see Mt 25:31-46).

CCC 526: To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom (see Mt 18:3-4). For this, we must humble ourselves and become little. Even more: to become "children of God" we must be "born from above" or "born of God" (Jn 3:7; 1:13; 1:12; see Mt 23:12). Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us (see Gal 4:19).

This is a catechesis of the primitive Church. What does the primitive Church want to tell us? Fundamentally, four things:

First: We must discover that we are blind. Have you discovered that you are blind? Have you discovered that you are going through life like that blind man who stays at the street corner, with your hand stretched out, begging for some little alms, for a little bit of love and happiness, because you don't know what to do? Have you looked for someone who may cure you? That blind man had looked for someone who could cure him, but he had not found him. He is a blind man condemned to beg for alms.

Second: This blind man has discovered that there is no one who is able to cure his blindness.

Third: This blind man has recognized that Jesus is the One sent by the Father to cure the blind. We must discover that Jesus is the One sent by the Father to cure our blindness because Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would cure all the blind and that they would see (see Lk 4:17-18). To this man, his own blindness creates a question about the existence of God. Because blindness is an evil. How can there be a God who is good and yet allows me to be blind? God must send someone, do something to cure and alleviate the blind. As a matter of fact: GOD HAS NOT ABANDONED THE BLIND, HE HAS SENT A LIBERATOR, HE HAS SENT JESUS. And while the Pharisees, the scribes and the priests didn't see anything in Jesus but a madman, a heretic, a Samaritan, one deserving death, this blind man, who was staying in the street, has recognized in Jesus the One sent by God, the Messiah, the Son of David.

Fourth: What does the blind man do then? HE SHOUTS: 'JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE PITY ON ME!' What does to shout mean? TO PRAY. Not once, but two, three, as many times as needed.

See how important the catechesis of the primitive Church is. At first, Jesus does not pay any attention and walks on. He wants to know up to what point this blind man believes. You will shout one, two, seventeen nights, until you make Jesus stop walking and stay. Jesus is passing and maybe he will never pass again. Take this opportunity now that he is passing and shout. Jesus will stop. Jesus is passing: Jesus comes here with us. And who does Jesus cure? THOSE WHO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY ARE BLIND. JESUS IS PASSING BECAUSE HE COMES HERE WITH US. But maybe you don't believe that the one who is passing is Jesus because you don't believe that an imbecile like me can lead you to Jesus.

What is necessary in this catechumenate? To pray. But we don't know how to pray. Do you have any big problems that Jesus Christ has not solved? Then go away because Jesus is of no use to you at all. Do you know why Jesus Christ has not solved your concrete problems? Because you have not asked for it. And do you know why you haven't asked? Because you don't believe. It is very simple. YOU DON'T BELIEVE THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS THE POWER TO FREE YOU OR SOLVE ANYTHING AT ALL. It is necessary to ask. If you had cancer and you knew that in Brazil there is someone who could cure you, I assure you that you would even go to steal, penny by penny, so you could get there and pay that person to cure you.

I assure you that if you had faith enough to stay a whole night, or the time God wants, asking: Jesus have pity on me, believing that Jesus has the power to cure you, that very night you would be cured of whatever it is, from whatever vice. But what happens? That we think that praying is only to say: Our Father who art in heaven..., or to be in front of the tabernacle while our imagination wanders I don't know where.

The fact is that we don't believe that we are blind. This prayer: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me," is the prayer of the heart, the prayer that the Eastern monks repeat without ever stopping. It is a prayer that makes tears flow. Suddenly, after having repeated it fifteen thousand times, there comes a love for Jesus, such an immense enlightenment... Cry out to him: Jesus, hasn't the Father sent you to save the poor? Don't you see that I am down and poor? Don't you see that I've gotten drunk, that I've beaten my wife, don't you see that I've masturbated? Don't you see that I am a wretched man? What are you doing? Don't you see? Have pity on me because you have been sent by God to free me. Cry out! Until Jesus stops and asks you: What do you want?

Do you know why God doesn't help you? Because you don't ask. Do you know what happens if God helps you without your asking him to do so? You believe that it was you who did it. That's why he, even though he is supremely free and can do anything, wants you to ask him to do it, because otherwise you steal his glory. And no one can steal God's glory. If you take God's glory for yourself, you will become a complete Pharisee because you will judge everyone. Everything that is given to you is given gratis, by grace, not for your merits. God is like this. God is the one who, through your sins, your blindness, your pride, your sexuality, will bring light for you. Because it is through your sins that you discover the mercy of God who loves you as you are: a sinner. The Cross, the primitive Church says, is the radiant light of the face of the Father. This is the Paschal Mystery of Jesus.

In the Gospels there is another story of a blind man, which is another catechesis (see Jn 9). Jesus is passing and sees a man blind from birth and his disciples ask him: Why is this man blind, as a punishment for his parents' sins or because of his own sins? Jesus answers: He is not blind because of his parents' sins, nor because of his own sins; he is blind so that the glory of God may be made manifest in him, the works of God, who loves sinners. Then he spat on the ground, made some mud and put it on his eyes.

Another catechesis of the primitive Church. This blind man hasn't asked Jesus for anything. This is a different blind man. This blind man is peacefully in the street and Jesus goes by speaking with his disciples. Imagine the scene: the blind man is there, unaware of the discussion between Jesus and his disciples. Imagine that I am that blind man. I am peacefully begging for alms, without saying anything to anyone and suddenly...splat: they fill my eyes with mud and I hear a voice saying: "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash." This poor blind man would say: "Of course I'm going to wash. Don't you see that you've covered me with mud?" Then the Scriptures say that the

blind man went to wash and, once washed, his eyes opened, he started to see and to shout that he could see. But he didn't know yet who had cured him. You can read it. So Jesus meets him again and says to him: Do you believe in the Son of Man? IT IS I." The blind man then kneels down and adores him: "Lord!" He recognizes that Jesus is his savior after he has cured him.

What is the catechumenate? A time in which mud will be put in your eyes. It is Jesus Christ who does this. Because you do not know that you are blind. You don't know that you are dirty and therefore you don't want to wash. Jesus will put mud in your eyes so that you may feel uncomfortable and have to go to wash in the waters of your Baptism, to wash yourself of your sins. This is a marvelous catechesis. Now we are just beginning, but do you know what will be the outlines for your catecheses later on? The Gospels, which were the outlines of the primitive Church.

The first of the two catecheses of the blind men is to tell the people to pray, to ask, to be alert, because Christ is passing, he will pass in these catechesis. The second is to say that Jesus will put mud in your eyes so that you may sense that you are a sinner, so that you may discover that you are dirty. Sure enough, some of the people listening to you are there not because they realize they are blind or need something, but simply out of curiosity, like this second blind man. And look, precisely to him the same thing has happened. He came into the Church and he has met Jesus, who has put mud on his eyes so that he may feel the need to wash, so that he may wash and see. This is important because the people who listen to you are more similar to this second blind man than to the first. The fact is that we got used to our blindness, we are blind bourgeois, who have resigned themselves and are used to living like that, without moving. We are used to our lives and we calmly beg for alms. WE NEED SOMEONE WHO MAKES US DISCOVER THAT OUR LIVES ARE A MUCH GREATER MARVEL THAN WHAT WE HAVE REDUCED THEM TO. We are lazy people, we believe that life is like that, grey and flat. We need someone to tell us that life is not like that, who will make us see the love of God in our lives, who will make us see that our life is much more beautiful, so that we may truly and clearly see this marvel.

At the end, let the one who has given the catechesis say a prayer to the Lord inspired by the catechesis, asking with all his heart for the gift of prayer for everyone.

(Carmen)

At the "Our Father," let only the one who has given the catechesis raise his hands. The people are not used to this, so until they have been catechized, they could get annoyed if all of you raise them. Instead, if the one who talked did it with strength and faith, after having given his experience and not having presented himself as perfect but as a man in sincere conversion, the people will accept it very well if he raises his hands at the "Our Father."

(Kiko)

1st Day: Introduction

Experience has taught us this. If all of you lift your hands, people will think that you are some fanatics. They will say the spontaneous prayers later on, in the celebrations. Let the one who gave the catechesis say the prayer with humility and truth and at the end let all finish with the "Our Father."

Remember to announce what day of the next catechesis will be and also the time. For the moment neither songs, nor embraces of peace. These will be done at the first celebration. I will explain to you later on when to teach the songs. Don't teach the invocation "O Lord, send forth your Spirit" until the fourth catechesis.

SECOND DAYPASTORAL OF EVANGELIZATION
THE SIGNS OF FAITH

Catechism of the Catholic Church: At the heart of catechesis: Christ (426-429); evangelization: obligation and right of the Church (848-856); evangelization and witness of the baptized (2044, 2472); the presences of Christ (1088-1089); the Kingdom of God is at hand (541-542); the proclamation of the Kingdom of God (543-546); the signs of the Kingdom of God (547-550); charity (the new commandment: 1822-1829); unity (813-822).

(Kiko)

This catechesis and the following two are to explain what we are doing in the parishes and why. This catechesis brings into focus the problems of the parish, of the pastor and the aim of the neocatechumenal Way, which we want to start in the parish.

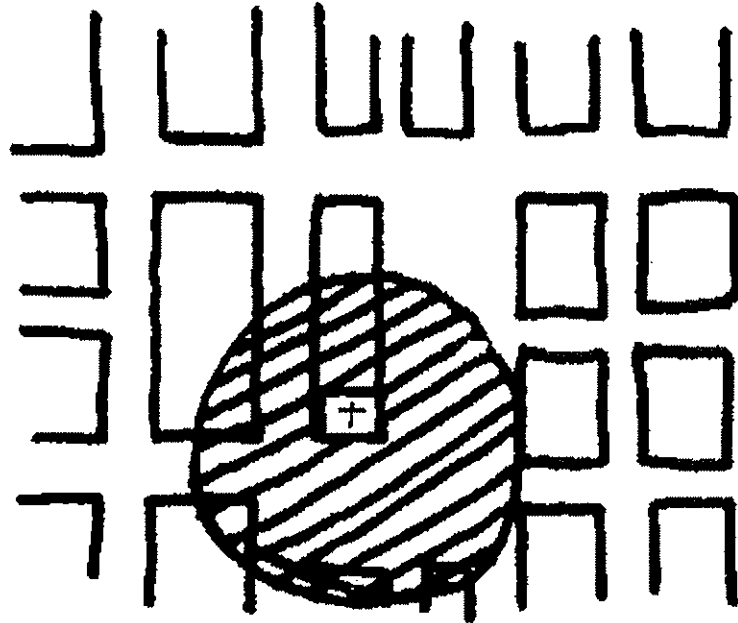
Today we hear a lot of talk about evangelization and that it's necessary to pass from a pastoral of sacramentalization to a pastoral of evangelization.¹ What is this neocatechumenal Way that we are beginning in the parishes? It is precisely to open within the parish a pastoral of evangelization, in which people can be initiated into faith. Why is there this necessity today to pass to a pastoral of evangelization? The point of this catechesis will be to explain this, clarifying also how and in what sense this evangelization will develop.

We begin with a drawing. Let's imagine that this drawing represents the parish. Each parish has its assigned territory. Let's imagine then that this drawing is the territory of a parish in some city. Immediately we find ourselves in front of a fact: out of the fifty, forty, or thirty thousand people who belong to the parish, only a certain percentage, which varies from place to place, fulfills the Sunday Mass obligation.

There are some parishes where the Mass attendance is at the most 30%, in others 20%, others 10% and in some industrial suburban areas, even 1%... There is thus a definite group of people in the parish who attends Mass. Let's assume an average of 20%. This group of people are those who really belong to the parish: the rest belong to it only juridically. In the whole drawing we show all the people who belong territorially to the parish and in the shaded circle the people who attend Mass,

¹ CCC 848: "Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men" (AG 7; cf. Heb 11:6; 1 Cor 9:16).

that 20%. Let's keep this drawing in mind for what we will say later.



What is a pastoral of sacramentalization? It is a pastoral by which, through a specific pastoral action or way of acting in the parish, one intends to lead the people to Jesus Christ the savior. How has the Church been leading the people to meet Jesus Christ? By means of the sacraments, or rather, by means of the presences of Jesus Christ.² Christ is present above all in the hierarchy and in the sacraments. Where Jesus Christ is present, there it's necessary to meet him so that he may help us, save us and draw us out of our situations of suffering and death.

What type of presence has the Church preached above all? Let us see some:

- Christ is present in the tabernacle: this is why the priests tell the people to go and pray in front of the tabernacle, to ask for graces.

- Christ is present in the sacraments: in the Eucharist, in Confession, in Baptism, in Marriage, etc.; it's necessary to

² CCC 1373: "Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us," is present in many ways to his Church: (Rom 8:34; cf. LG 48) in his word, in his Church's prayer, "where two or three are gathered in my name," (Mt 18:20) in the poor, the sick and the imprisoned, (cf. Mt 25:31-46) in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass and in the person of the minister. But "he is present... most especially in the Eucharistic species" (SC 7).

feed on Christ in the sacraments, so it's necessary to go to Mass and Confession frequently, etc.

- Christ is present in the Church, in the bishops, in the Pope, in the priests: that's why the Church tells the people that they must obey the Pope and the bishops and to receive spiritual direction from a priest.

- Christ is present in the poor, in the sick, in those who suffer: that's why the Church recommends that people do works of charity among the poor and the needy, to visit hospitals, prisons, etc.

- Christ is also present glorious in heaven: so we must pray all the time, in the street, in the countryside, because Jesus Christ intercedes for us from heaven and we must invoke him through prayer.

More or less, the parishes base their pastoral on these moments, on these presences of Jesus Christ. The priests try to bring the people to meet Jesus Christ through these presences.

This type of pastoral is what is called a pastoral of sacramentalization. But what is the problem that confronts this type of pastoral? That it is of use only for the 20% of people who continue to attend Mass, for those we put in the shaded circle, but it is of no use for those who have left the parish and no longer come to church.

It is in this sense that Cardinal Dell'Acqua, in Rome, said that this is a type of pastoral of conservation, because it is of use only for those people who are already coming to the church. The result is that this type of pastoral is not missionary. And this is the problem of the pastoral of sacramentalization: this type of pastoral does not reach those people who live outside the church. It is valid for the 20% of people who go to church.

But why doesn't it reach those who do not go to church? For a very simple reason. Because those who no longer go to Church, those who have left it, do not have faith anymore and so this pastoral is no longer of use to them. Because in order to believe that Jesus Christ is in the tabernacle, one needs faith. In order to believe that Jesus Christ is in the Mass, one needs faith. To believe that Jesus Christ is in confession, one needs to have faith. In order to believe that Jesus Christ is in the priest, one needs to have even more faith. In order to believe that Jesus Christ is in the bishops, one needs much more faith. In order to believe that Jesus Christ is in those who suffer, one needs much, much more faith because those who are suffering make people think that God doesn't exist, because if God is so good, people say, why does he allow children to die of hunger, wars, cancer, etc.? Without faith it is impossible to understand the suffering of the world. In order to believe that Jesus Christ is in heaven and to pray to him, one needs also to have faith. So this pastoral is of use only for those people who have this minimum of faith, who believe in these presences of Jesus Christ.

But how can you say to a person who no longer goes to church, who has left it, to go to the tabernacle, if he no longer believes that Jesus Christ is there? These people will

not go to church because they no longer believe that God can be found there.

This pastoral of sacramentalization is not missionary and when it stops being missionary, it stops accomplishing the most important part of its work.

Thus the Church is running a great risk. Cardinal Dell'Acqua said this in a speech to the pastors of Rome: if the Church keeps only this type of pastoral, she is no longer missionary. The Church in France calls this the "consumer pastoral" because we live in a consumer society and they call the people who go to Mass "consumers of worship."

What problem does this situation pose for us in the parishes? It's not matter of reaching just the man who goes to church, whom we can still reach with the pastoral of sacramentalization, but also the one who is outside the parish, for whom, as a matter of fact, none of these presences are of use.

Here the signs of faith are needed.

We must find a presence of Christ which may call every man to faith, so that even a pagan, an atheist, a desacralized man, a technical man, a pragmatic man, who does not have faith in Jesus Christ and no longer comes to church, by seeing this presence, this sign, may be drawn to Jesus Christ, may know Jesus Christ.

Has Jesus Christ given his Church signs that call people to faith? (A sign of faith is something that, when seen, calls to faith.) What is this sign? Jesus Christ says: LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU (in the dimension of the Cross); BY THIS LOVE THEY WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES (see Jn 13:34ff). And he also says: Be perfectly one, "so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (see Jn 17:21).

In the parish we must give these signs of faith that call men to faith, because on seeing them, the people may believe that Jesus Christ is the one sent by the Father for them, so that they may know that God has not remained indifferent in front of their sufferings and their problems, but that he has sent a helper, a savior, Jesus Christ.

What are these signs?

There are two kinds of signs: one is that of the physical miracle. When St. Peter leaves the Cenacle after having received the Holy Spirit, he says to the people: BRETHREN, THIS MAN WHOM YOU HAVE CRUCIFIED AS A MURDERER AND A CRIMINAL, THIS MAN WHOM YOU HAVE KILLED, GOD HAS RESURRECTED HIM, HAS RAISED HIM UP OVER EVERY POWER, OVER EVERY VIRTUE AND DOMINATION THAT EXIST IN THIS WORLD and HAS CONSTITUTED HIM AS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR. HE HAS GIVEN HIM POWER OVER EVERY NAME, SO THAT IN HIM YOU HAVE A SAVIOR. ALL OF YOU WHO ARE HERE CAN BE SAVED IN HIM, BY INVOKING HIS NAME, BECAUSE TO HIM GOD HAS GIVEN A NAME WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY OTHER NAME ON EARTH. BY INVOKING THE NAME OF JESUS, YOU CAN OVERCOME YOUR DEATH, YOUR ANGER, YOUR PRIDE, YOUR LUST, YOUR CONCUPISCENCE, ETC., BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN CONSTITUTED BY GOD AS SAVIOR AND FORGIVENESS OF ALL YOUR SINS (see Acts 2:14-36).

Do you know what the people must have thought of this preaching? This: What did you just say? That this wretch whom we killed, God has constituted as Lord? What blasphemy are you saying? (The Hebrews use the word "Lord" to refer to God, so to say that Jesus has been constituted our Lord, our Savior, that he is God himself, for them is blasphemy.) How could they believe all this? There was need of signs that might confirm the words of the apostles, to call the people to listen to the GOOD NEWS. In fact, many people believed in St. Peter's preaching, given power by the miracle of Pentecost.

After this, what does St. Peter do? At the gates of the Temple, there is a paralytic begging for alms (see Acts 3). St. Peter, looking intently in his eyes, says to him: IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED, I SAY TO YOU: GET UP AND WALK. Imagine this poor paralytic, as Acts tells us (see Acts 4:22), whose bones must have already been all twisted; imagine him hearing this word: GET UP AND WALK IN THE NAME OF JESUS. St. Peter has announced that God as Lord has constituted this Jesus over every power. Here we have a man dominated by a power: the paralysis that keeps him enchained and prevents him from walking. Jesus has been made Lord over paralysis as well as over death. And to show this, St. Peter says: I SAY TO YOU: IN THE NAME OF JESUS, GET UP AND WALK. The paralytic, to the astonishment of the crowd, stands up by the power of Jesus and walks. This miracle is a sign that proves the word of the apostle. On seeing this, the people are astonished and they see that Jesus has the power to make a paralytic get up and walk and they believe in the preaching. They see that the name of Jesus has received its power from God.

You too are a paralytic. You are paralyzed by your sins. St. Peter says and I'm saying to you: in the name of Jesus, get up and walk. And if you believe in my preaching, you can invoke the name of Jesus and rise from your paralysis, not through any power of yours, nor because of your merits, but by the power and merits of Jesus Christ.

But Jesus cannot do anything for one who does not believe in him. The Gospel says that Jesus came to Nazareth and the people laughed at him and he couldn't make miracles, because they didn't believe (see Lk 4:16-30). So if there is here someone who does not believe in Jesus, Jesus will not do anything for him. But if today you believe that Jesus Christ can provide an answer to your situation of death...How can he remain indifferent if he loves you, in front of the problems you have, in front of your envy, in front of the problems you have with your wife, at home, in front of your rage, in front of your drunkenness, in front of all the evil powers which assail you and bring you to death, how is this possible if God is love? God cannot remain inactive, he has to send someone to help you: God sends you Jesus Christ.

Here you see how the physical miracle has helped to give strength to the word of the apostle and has made faith possible for the people listening to his preaching.³

So now someone will say: That's it! Now we know what's happening in the Church today: there are no miracles, that's why things are going so badly. Let's slow down. Because if we read the *Acts of the Apostles* we discover a very important thing: that miracles occur rarely and in definite moments, to help to give credibility to the word of the apostle. Since the Holy Spirit used to come down in the laying on of hands by the apostles and the one who received it was confirmed in his faith by receiving the Holy Spirit in fullness and since the laying on of hands confirmed the work of the apostle in the believer, the apostles had to show that the laying on of hands was efficacious, since it was capable of healing physical illness. So the people saw that the apostles really had power, that Jesus Christ really was accompanying them.

About this, I can give you a personal experience. When we were at Vingone (Florence) we saw that they were not accepting our preaching, we got to the point of thinking that perhaps we needed God to make us work miracles. There was a paralytic there and we were ready to say to him: in the name of Jesus Christ, I say to you, get up, so that all these people may be confounded, since no one believed our preaching. And we were ready to do that because Jesus said: go and heal the sick.

³ CCC 547: Jesus accompanies his words with many "mighty works and wonders and signs," which manifest that the kingdom is present in him and attest that he was the promised Messiah (Acts 2:22; cf. Lk 7:18-23).

CCC 548: The signs worked by Jesus attest that the Father has sent him. They invite belief in him (cf. Jn 5:36; 10:25, 38). To those who turn to him in faith, he grants what they ask (cf. Jn 5:36; 10:25, 38). So miracles strengthen faith in the One who does his Father's works; they bear witness that he is the Son of God (cf. Jn 10:31-38) But his miracles can also be occasions for "offense" (Mt 11:6); they are not intended to satisfy people's curiosity or desire for magic. Despite his evident miracles some people reject Jesus; he is even accused of acting by the power of demons (cf. Jn 11:47-48; Mk 3:22).

CCC 549: By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, injustice, illness and death, (cf. Jn 6:5-15) Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless he did not come to abolish all evils here below, (cf. Lk 12:13-14) but to free men from the gravest slavery, sin, which thwarts them in their vocation as God's sons and causes all forms of human bondage (cf. Jn 8:34-36)

CCC 550: The coming of God's kingdom means the defeat of Satan's: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:26, 28). Jesus' exorcisms free some individuals from the domination of demons. They anticipate Jesus' great victory over "the ruler of this world" (Jn 12:31) The kingdom of God will be definitively established through Christ's cross: "God reigned from the wood" (Hymn *Vexilla Regis*).

Jesus gave the apostles power to heal the sick. But the physical miracle wasn't necessary because, thanks be to God, a small group of those listening believed our preaching.

And this small group, made up of old ladies, has made it possible that today there are communities in many parishes in Tuscany.

The physical miracle is not only an act of God's mercy towards someone but, above all, a sign meant to support the preaching. For we run the risk of thinking that what's important is that a man without legs may have them, since we all have legs and it seems horrible to us not to have them (see Jn 6:26). But happiness is not in that. That's why miracles take place in small doses and with great caution.

In the Acts of the Apostles we can see that miracles are performed mostly at the beginning: it's when the apostles need to potentiate their word. Thus God acts with power and miracles. But as soon as someone has accepted the Word, what happens? There are less and less miracles. Because the true miracle appears: the mission of the Church in the world, the miracle that God wants, that which the Council called the moral miracle. When THERE APPEARS THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF SAVED PEOPLE, as a community of brothers and sisters who are truly risen from death and can love each other in the dimension of the cross, then the physical miracle is no longer necessary. Love one another as I have loved you (in the cross), says Jesus. By this love everyone will know that you are my disciples.

The physical miracle is very limited. First of all, as in the case of the paralytic, who didn't ask to be cured, God forces man a little because he imposes himself. Moreover it reaches only a very few people: if you don't arrive in time to see it, if you are not there when it happens, you don't believe it. If you don't see it with your own eyes, you don't believe it.

What reaches the world is the moral miracle: a community of brothers and sisters, men and women, old and young, united by the preaching, saved from their death, from everything that used to divide them, gathered by the power of the risen Jesus Christ who has been constituted Kyrios. This is what reaches the world⁴: a community which is there for years, without imposing itself or forcing anyone, which is present in the midst of men, sharing their same lot, the pollution of the

⁴ CCC 854 By her very mission, "the Church... travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world: she is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (GS 40 §2). Missionary endeavor requires patience. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ (cf. Roman Missal 42-47), continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are "a sign of God's presence in the world," (AG 15 §11) and leads to the foundation of local churches (cf. Roman Missal 48-49).

atmosphere, the impoverished air of the cities, the life in the mines, all things, without going against anyone.

So our problem is not that there are or are not masses of people in the church. Our problem is only this: that there, where there is a group of people, there exist these signs given by a Church, which call the others to faith.

This moral miracle is Love.⁵ God, says St. John, is Love (see 1 Jn 4:8). No one has seen God and yet Christ says: "Whoever sees me, Philip, sees the Father" (see Jn 14:9). Whoever sees Jesus sees God. So it's clear: if we manage to see Jesus, we see God. But where is Jesus? Which of you has seen Jesus? Where can we go to see Jesus? JESUS AND HIS CHURCH ARE ONE AND THE SAME THING. This is the theology of the New Testament. The Church, as brothers and sisters who love each other, is the visible body of the risen Jesus Christ. We read this in the Acts of the Apostles, when Paul is going to Damascus and is thrown to the ground by a voice that tells him: "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). St. Paul was persecuting a sect of heretics, but Jesus appears to him on the way in the form of light and says to him: Why are you persecuting me? Jesus identifies himself completely with the Christians, so that St. Paul can never look at a Christian again without seeing Jesus in his eyes. Because of this, St. Paul will say: I am an abortion, the last one (see 1 Cor 15:8-9). Look how I was deceived: despite all the law and all my marvelous Pharisaic studies, I thought that the Gospel of Jesus Christ had to be destroyed and I persecuted the Christians. I thought it had to be destroyed, that which is above all other things.

St. Paul, speaking about marriage, also says (see Eph 5:32): This is a great mystery, that the two become one flesh. But for me this is important in that it is the sign of something even greater: the love of Christ for his Church. Christ (one) and you the other one (two): one flesh. This is very important. So that, whoever touches a Christian, touches Jesus Christ. "He who listens to you, listens to me; he who persecutes you, persecutes me," says Jesus (see Mt 10:41). Even more, says St. Matthew (see Mt 25:31-46), on the Day of Judgment, the nations will be gathered together and judged according to how they have acted towards the Church. For this reason, you know that we Christians will be seated on thrones and will judge the nations (see Mt 19:28). The nations will be judged according to how they have acted towards the Church. St. Matthew affirms this when he says: "For I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. I was naked and you clothed me." And the pagans will say: "When did

⁵ CCC 1823 Jesus makes charity the new commandment (cf. Jn 13:34). By loving his own "to the end" (Jn 13:1), he makes manifest the Father's love which he receives. By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive. Whence Jesus says: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love." And again: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:9, 12).

we see you, Lord...?" "When you did it to one of the least of my brethren." Who are the little brothers and sisters of Jesus? The Christians, because Christians are constituted ontologically as brothers and sisters of Jesus, because they share in his same nature as a sign, as a reality which is given in them and which is a good news for all the nations. For God is calling all the nations to this, but in the Christians it is given as a sign, as a sacrament. Christ identifies himself with the Christians, as the Church is the visible Body of the risen Jesus Christ.

But one might think: so the whole Church is the body of Jesus Christ. And here's where the confusion arises. Let's go back to the drawing we saw before.

We find ourselves with a pastoral of sacramentalization and we need to open a new type of pastoral, to find a way to reach that brother who is outside the Church. We have seen how Christ has established a great presence: the Church as a community that gives the signs of faith, signs that call to faith. Jesus himself says this in the Gospel.

What are the signs that call people to faith? Let us open the Gospel and read what Jesus says: LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. How did Christ love us? TO THE POINT OF DEATH. IN THIS KIND OF LOVE, ALL THE OTHER ONES WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES.

If, in this parish, says Jesus, there is a community of brothers and sisters (not a community only of young students, because the Church is catholic, which means universal, not in the sense that all the nations are, in fact, in the Church, but that every man is called to her) made up of old people, of married people, of single people, of young people, etc., who represent all of society, who love each other in the dimension of the cross, by this love that guy outside the Church will see that you are my disciples.

This is the first sign: LOVE. The second: UNITY. In fact, Jesus says: FATHER...I LIVING IN THEM AND YOU IN ME, THAT THEY MAY BE PERFECTLY ONE, AS YOU AND I ARE ONE, SO THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE THAT YOU HAVE SENT ME (Jn 17: 21-23).⁶ In other

⁶ CCC 791...The unity of the Mystical Body produces and stimulates charity among the faithful: "From this it follows that if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with him and if one member is honored, all the members together rejoice" (LG 7). Finally, the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ" (Gal 3:27-28).

CCC 820: "Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time" (UR 4 §33). Christ always gives his Church the gift of unity, but the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her. This is why Jesus himself

word, Jesus says that if in the parish there is a group of men who love each other beyond death (which means that they have overcome death and are perfectly one), this man who never comes to Mass, when he sees them, will have to say: These are disciples of Jesus (because they love one another). And if they are perfectly one, he will say: This Jesus is the one sent by God to the world.

These are the words of Jesus. Unless we want to say that Jesus is a liar, that he lies. Nobody has yet spoken to this man; he has only seen some signs.

And I would ask: in this parish, where are these signs given today? Where are these brothers and sisters who love each other in the dimension of the cross and are perfectly one? Because Jesus says: Love one another visibly, so that the others may see you loving each other. Where are these signs given today?

It is true that in that period of time when everybody used to go to church, perhaps these signs were not so necessary because the churches were full and it was perfectly possible to carry out a pastoral of sacramentalization with many people: spiritual exercises, Lenten missions, telling the people to come to Mass, because everyone had at least the beginnings of faith. These people believed that God was present in the temple. But today we find ourselves in a process of secularization, in which people are practical atheists. Atheism is no longer a minority phenomenon, but a phenomenon of the masses. The mass of the workers, for the most part, has left the Church and the intellectuals are no longer in the Church either. The world is little by little leaving the Church. So we must return to the pastoral of the Acts of the Apostles, a missionary pastoral. This is important.

The pastor who today is not working in a pastoral for tomorrow will be left with an empty church, or with a group of people who go to church and who perhaps have a faith which is not adult.

This is very important. I remember very well the words of Fr Juan Manuel Ávalos, pastor of St. Joseph's parish (in the center of Madrid) who, when they said to him: look, the Pope has said that Catholic Action is still useful, replied: but I must think of tomorrow, in the unfortunate case that "still" ends. And for tomorrow, I must plan a missionary pastoral.

It is already some time since the book "*France Land of Mission*" was published, after statistics had been collected. This is already indisputable. Spain is now also a mission country because we know that the traditional faith, according to which everybody is a Christian, is no longer the true

prayed at the hour of his Passion and does not cease praying to his Father, for the unity of his disciples: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also may be one in us, . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21). The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit.

situation. It does not matter anymore that all of us should be Christian. Whoever is a Christian is a Christian: the one in whom the risen Jesus Christ is living and he shows this with his life, in the facts, because he does the works of Jesus Christ.

So what do we want to do in this parish? To form these signs of faith. But thinking not only of those who are inside, but mostly of those who are outside the Church. That's why we say to the pastors: This pastoral is missionary, it's for the far away. These communities that we form are not so much for the sake of those who are in the parish, but of those who no longer come. And this is something that we are already ascertaining to be true. In Rome, out of the seven communities present in the parish of Canadian Martyrs, of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, the people who form the fifth, sixth and seventh communities are people who no longer attended Mass, who no longer went to church. So why do they come now? Because they are people who were struck by the testimony given by those in the first communities. They are people who work with someone who is in a community and asked him to let them know when the next catechesis would be because they have seen signs in him. And they are people who had stopped going to Mass. You know that in Italy the political situation is different from ours: there are all sorts of political parties (Communist, Republican, etc.) and there are people who do not baptize their children nor get married in church as is happening already all over Europe.

The same thing is beginning to happen here: many people no longer come to church. And it's necessary to think of them because the Church cannot stop: she must see how to call back these brothers and sisters who have left. So these catecheses are not Lenten lectures, but something very serious: we want to form in the parish a community that may be a sign. In time this community will change the pastoral and the structure of the parish.

(Carmen)

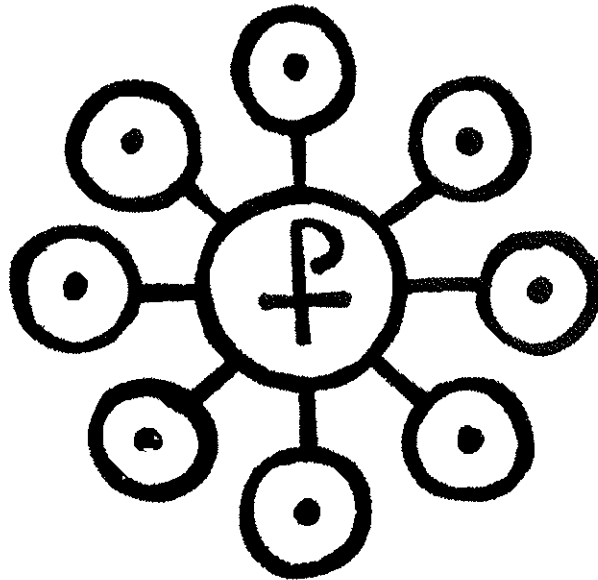
You know that Cardinal Tarazona, Archbishop of Madrid, has said that it's necessary to re-evangelize those who are sacramentalized. It's necessary to re-evangelize, to make the faith resound in all these people who are sacramentalized, so that they may pass to a Church that is alive in faith.

(Kiko)

It is very important to have clear ideas. This community wants to call to faith those who are far away, because the signs of Love and Unity given by the community create question marks among the people. If in this parish there is a community of brothers and sisters who begin to love each other a little bit because God is in their midst, because Jesus Christ is among them, destroying their old man and building the new man, Christ, truly a person outside the Church will begin to ask himself: but who are you? What do you do? Are you from Opus Dei or from the Focolare? How can you do what you do? As Jacinto

was saying the other day about a coworker of his who said to him: don't join these communities, because in our office there is one of them who is such an idiot..., everybody gives him work, because he puts up with everything. I don't know who this brother is, but he should know that is giving a great testimony at work, because he is being the Servant of Yahweh and through him the others know who the people of "these" communities are. Similarly, if one of you is giving a sign against the community, he should realize that he is destroying the Church. And everyone will notice it and say: ah! I know these communities... I know one of them...such a guy! That's why in the primitive Church when someone gave scandal, they sent him away from the community so that he would convert: the whole community was being judged on the basis of what that brother was doing.

Certainly people will come and ask you: how do you manage to accept what destroys you, because I can't? I see that you are in peace and instead my life is hell because I have no peace... Then, as St. Peter says, give the reason for your hope (see 1 Pt 3:15). It is then that you must announce the gospel. This is the moment to invite him to the community so that he may know it and if he is interested in it, let him sign up for the catechumenate. Because, since the community cannot be formed of more than 50 brothers and sisters, because they must know each other, he will not join your community but another which will be formed and as many communities as are needed will be formed.



This is how we arrive at that new type of parish, about which many documents of the Church speak, a parish that is a "community of communities," an atomic parish, made up of small Christian communities, on a way of conversion, reliving their baptism in a Christian community. These come into being alongside the other realities of the parish, which will be enriched by them. This is what has already happened in many

parishes: by a process of emulation, all the other realities in the parish grow.⁷

Don't think that this is utopian. Even if you have very poor communities and you don't see this yet, believe that this is true because we will arrive at this. The signs of faith are much more powerful than what you can imagine. It is clear that the signs of faith cannot be invented. Either they are given or they are not given. That's why, in many of your communities, it may be that Jesus Christ is there, or it may be not. This doesn't come about just because some catecheses are given; it happens if it happens. Jesus Christ makes himself visible through his Spirit. It may be that which you think is a sign of Jesus Christ, is perhaps only a sign of your honesty, of your human qualities, signs which a Marxist can give as well as you do and even better. Moreover, during the catechumenate, you are not yet able to give the signs of adult faith. The one who knows if you are giving signs of adult faith is the Apostle and the catechist, that is the one whom the bishop has entrusted with the task of leading you to faith, of leading you throughout the catechumenate, of watching over the way like an older brother.

For example, there are brothers and sisters who do not think at all that they are Christian. I have seen this in Rome. I was seeing very clearly the finger of God and how this person was changing radically. But God did not allow him to see this so that he would not become proud. He considers himself to be a miserable wretch and yet the community is seeing marvels in him. That's why, in the primitive Church, there was a godfather, a guarantor, who had to lead the walking of the catechumen. He was the one who had to tell the bishop if the catechumen was giving signs, if he was doing works of faith, of eternal life. And which are the works of eternal life? TO DEFEAT DEATH. This is the Good News: THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS DEFEATED DEATH AND THAT THE RISEN CHRIST COMES TO YOU. About this point, there are no excuses: neither being a priest, nor a nun, nor a monk, nor a bishop. Already St. Thomas Aquinas used to say this: to be a saint it is not necessary to know much. This is an immense truth. THE CHRISTIAN IS THE ONE WHO HAS WITHIN HIMSELF THE SPIRIT OF THE RISEN LORD, WHO REALLY PASSES THROUGH DEATH, WHO WALKS ON THE WATERS.

There's a marvelous image of this in the Gospel (see Mt 14:22-33): the apostles are out rowing on the lake at night. Suddenly, Jesus appears to them, walking on the waters and they have a stroke out of fear. They begin to shout out hysterically. So Jesus Christ says to them: Courage, it is I. Because they thought he was a ghost, a specter. St. Peter, when he sees that it is Jesus Christ walking on the water, he says: Is it you, Lord? If it is you, call me and I come to you. This is an impulse of the kind that St. Peter often has. Jesus says to him: Come! Then St. Peter, without a second thought, jumps out of the boat and begins walking above the water towards Jesus. The wind is blowing hard and the waves are rough. Suddenly he realizes that he is walking upon the water and bam!

⁷ See Statistics produced by the Spanish Episcopal Conference

He sinks. Jesus approaches him and, taking him by the hand, says: Why did you doubt, man of little faith?

Just imagine the scene. As long as St. Peter walks looking at Jesus, he walks upon the water. The moment he stops looking at Jesus and looks at the water, he sinks.

This is important: in the measure that you walk looking at your death, at your sins, at your lust, at your filth, you will sink. Don't look at your sins; look at Jesus, you will see how you will walk on the water. What does water signify? Death.

A Christian is one who has defeated death. Jesus has come so that you may walk upon death because death is that which encircles us all. Nobody can walk on death, only Jesus because he is the only one who has defeated death. He walks on the waters. This is the sign of faith: to walk over death, to have more power than death. This is the Good News: JESUS COMES TO FREE US ALL FROM DEATH.

We were speaking about giving the signs of faith to these men who are far away. This catechesis seeks to explain how the pastoral of sacramentalization is no longer missionary for the world, for that man who no longer goes to church. And that's why we say that it's necessary to give new signs of faith: Love and Unity.

Don't worry if, talking about Love and Unity, you repeat it many times in the first catecheses, because this always impresses people. The same goes for the Kerygma, you must give it many times. Read all these texts of the Gospel that I have spoken about: the paralytic, Jesus walking upon the waters, etc. and meditate on them before giving the catechesis. The Lord will help you and inspire you. The catechesis starts off from the drawing and from the necessity of forming in the parish a community that may call to conversion those who are already in the parish and those who no longer come to church.

Jesus Christ speaks about Love and Unity in the discourse at the Last Supper. This is not a moralism. In the primitive Church this catechesis was preceded by the announcement of the Kerygma and by all the catechumenate.

And how can we get to the point that Love and Unity may be given in us? How can I come to such a faith that I am able to love all the other brothers and sisters more than my own life? This is the point. How can we reach this stature of faith? How can we defeat death? FAITH COMES THROUGH PREACHING says St. Paul (see Rom 10:17). And how did the primitive Church used to do it? BY MEANS OF A CATECHUMENAL WAY.

And why do we do this Catechumenal Way in small communities? To be able to give the signs of faith.

This is what we want to do through this catechesis: to explain the reason for the neocatechumenal Way that we are inaugurating in the parish and it will be done in small communities. It's necessary to clarify this about the communities well, because when people hear talk of communities they get disconcerted because they have a great confusion in their heads about basic Christian communities. That's why it's necessary to explain clearly the why's of this reality.

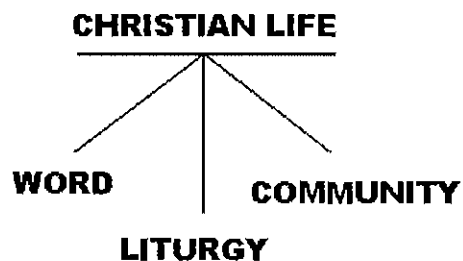
In order to arrive at loving the others more than your life you must have adult faith. What is adult faith? TO HAVE THE SPIRIT OF THE RISEN JESUS CHRIST, VICTORIOUS OVER DEATH. But whoever has it, has it. And if one does not have it, what can he do? Imagine that all those who are listening to you do not have it because this is clearly shown (the one who is no longer prisoner of sin, who walks upon the waters, is the one who has overcome death). So how can we arrive at having faith? By means of a catechumenal way, which is the way that the Church has always had to lead men to faith: a way of gestation.

Here you can introduce the figure of the Virgin Mary. It's important to present the neocatechumenal Way as a way of gestation. An angel arrives to Mary, an angel is sent to you. The angel says: Rejoice, Mary, because you are full of the love of God. I say to you: Rejoice, brothers and sisters, because God is choosing you, to work wonders in you. Go on like this developing the whole parallel.

What is faith? It is a gestation, a catechumenal way. And what is this catechumenal way that is opened in the parish, inaugurating a pastoral work of evangelization? It's a gestation, a way in which Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, will be gestated in you. The primitive Church has always seen faith as a gestation. That's why baptism was considered giving birth and the baptismal font was called the "womb of the Church," "the uterus of the Church," where the new children of God are given birth. That's why the Holy Virgin is the image of the Church that gestates Jesus Christ. The Church gestates Christians.

But today what happens to you? You were baptized when you were babies, but perhaps your baptism, this seed that you have received, has not been sufficiently watered and your baptism has not developed to the point of being a mature reality in you. What is this neocatechumenal Way? IT'S MAKING THIS BAPTISM DEVELOP, a time in which this seed which you have received will be watered and you will be gestated so that the embryo which you received in your baptism may grow in you until it becomes an adult reality.

And what will make this seed grow? THE WORD OF GOD, THE LITURGY and THE COMMUNITY, the tripod of which the Second Vatican Council speaks 54 times.



This tripod supports all the neocatechumenal Way and the whole of Christian life.

Be careful because the people interpret this of "love one another as I have loved you" as a moralism, that is that they "must" love with only their own strength. That's why it's opportune to insist in saying that we, by ourselves, cannot love like this, because in order to love like this, one must have the adult Jesus Christ within himself, have an adult faith. From this comes the necessity of taking a journey during which Jesus Christ may be gestated within us, in which the "full maturity" of Jesus Christ may be given to us (see Eph 4:13). A long way, in which, by means of the tripod, Jesus Christ will be given to us in this measure, through the development of our baptism in stages.

That's why, in the catechumenal way, this of love one another as I have loved you is explained at the end of the way, in the eucharistic catecheses and therefore in the Gospel it is found at the Last Supper. This is the final summing up of the whole catechumenate: NOW, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

In his *Letter to the Ephesians* St. Polycarp says that St. John, the most beloved disciple of Jesus, who was already a hundred years old and was carried to the community by the brothers and sisters because he could no longer walk used to repeat only these words: My children, love one another. Some were so tired of hearing him always saying the same thing that they asked him: But can't you say anything else? He replied: This is the only thing I heard from Jesus. He was saying that this was Christianity. Because, just as the summary of all of the Law and the Prophets is the love of one's neighbor as oneself, in the same way, the summary of the whole of Christianity is to love the brothers and sisters in the dimension of the cross. For if God has taken away from you your heart of stone and has given you the heart of Jesus Christ, this must be manifested and made visible in a "sacrament": in the community. Where is it shown that you do love the black people of the Congo, the young and the old? In the community. The community is the efficacious sign, the sacrament, in which the fact that you have a heart which has been transformed, a universal heart, the heart of Jesus Christ, that you are a Son of God, is made explicit, is expressed and is made visibly concrete.

(Carmen)

The first thing that needs doing is to evangelize those who are in the Church, to re-evangelize the Church herself, which is what the Pope and all the bishops are saying: evangelization within the Church, so that she can carry out her mission.

There is a danger that this catechesis becomes a lesson to show the need there is today for a catechumenate. That's why it's fundamental that in all the catechesis the Kerygma is announced to the people who are listening, that in the catecheses the people really receive the impact with Jesus

Christ. They easily forget the other things and this impact is given when, while talking about the signs of faith, the Kerygma is announced. This is what's important. The power of the catechizing lies fundamentally in the fact that the Kerygma is announced each day.

(Kiko)

I believe it's very important for us to see that today in the Church it's necessary to form Christian communities in which it may be clearly seen that the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ is present, because there death has been overcome, because they love one other beyond death. But, today, where is this Spirit? So, how can we arrive at giving this visibly? By means of a catechumenate. This is what we will do in the parish.

The Second Vatican Council Also spoke of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation (see LG 48). The word "sacrament" means visible and efficacious sign. What has to be made visible? Salvation. See, love beyond death.

THIRD DAYDESACRALIZATION, DECHRISTIANIZATION, CRISIS OF FAITH

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The heart of man, source of the passions, root of sin (582, 1764, 1853, 2517); the desire for God (27-38); revelation and faith (52-100, 142-184); God is love (218-221); the Church and non-Christians (839-856, 2095-2109).

(Kiko)

The community starts a new pastoral of evangelization in the parish. This means inaugurating in the parish a neocatechumenal line, a post-baptismal catechumenate lasting years, in which the people may rediscover faith and be initiated into it.

There cannot exist any neocatechumenal way without the signs of faith. This is the catechesis we gave the previous day. We experienced this recently in Italy. We have a list of thirty parishes that are asking to start this catechumenate. In Italy still there is almost no parish that does not have a community of some kind or another. You know already how many of these communities were formed. The priest, with some young people, formed a group to study the Bible. They opened the Bible, read it, commented on it, until one evening somebody said: "But what are we doing here? This is idle talk. We are here reading the Bible while there are people dying of hunger in India and in the war in Vietnam..." On that day they closed the Bible and talked about "problems." The following day somebody suggested they should deal with topics of any kind, which should be concerned with everyone, because the Bible does not reach the man of today. The following days they spoke about justice in the world, about the poor. Little by little, these groups became smaller and smaller because some old people as well used to go to the Bible meetings, but when the subject was changed and they started talking politics these old people left because the young people called them fascists. At the end these groups became very small and more and more politicized. Some of these groups celebrated the Eucharist in houses, with ordinary bread and the priest was not vested, etc. Well! These groups were languishing and they didn't know why. It was because by now what united them was no longer the Word of God, but their ideas. They created such big problems within the parishes that pastors began to call us in to help them remake these base groups.

There we committed a mistake because, without our realizing it, that was a trap set for us. We went there to talk, everyone in the group came with some other friends of theirs and we gave the catechesis. But they were not interested at all in following a catechumenate or anything of the kind. What they were interested in was strengthening their group. The Servant of Yahweh, non-resistance to evil made them laugh because they were very politicized. They did not even want to hear talk about doing a catechumenate in which other people from outside would

lead them like older brothers, they just didn't want to know. "The community guides itself, cutting its way through by means of a constant quest" they said. Some people in this group, others called by them and also people who had been fermented by the testimony they had received from our communities, were coming to the catecheses. These were people who belonged to other parishes who were coming to this parish to listen to the catechesis and then go back to their parish, where there was already a community. Our experience has taught us that all those who have not been fermented by a sign do not listen; they do not have an open ear and they do not accept the preaching. They listen only to what they already believe and if you don't tell them what they are already thinking, they immediately argue with you. I am telling you this experience in order to make it clear that the neocatechumenal Way is born from the signs of faith.

That's why in the past catechesis we told you that if we want to begin a serious catechumenate in a parish, the first thing we must do is to form a Christian community that, from within the parish, may give the signs of faith. Because otherwise the people come with their ears very closed and they do not listen. It's obvious that, if a cousin of yours or a co-worker is impressed by your attitude and is interested in knowing how you resolve the problems of life and he talks to you about this and he goes to some celebrations of your community, it's obvious that this person, if he likes it, will want to enter and he will ask you what he should do. And when you tell him that he has to listen to a catechesis, he will go to it with his ear already opened, ready to listen to the Word of God. WHAT PREPARES A PERSON TO LISTEN TO THE WORD IS THE SIGN OF FAITH.

That's why, in the past catechesis, we explained to you the need for the signs of faith. This is long-term pastoral: a long time is needed, years, before there may exist in the parish a community which has listened to the Word; then that this Word may incarnate; and then that the community may begin to give the signs of faith.

So you must be patient. For example, the pastor of Zamora was patient, because the community we formed there five years ago was born in a working-class milieu in which everything had failed and the people were fed up with everything and in spite of the fact that the whole population turned against the community when it was born. Sociologically, when a closed group is born people tend to turn against it because they see a division. The pastor was patient enough to wait for years during which both he and the community suffered a lot because everyone attacked them. They called them the "Los Aguedas" (those of St. Agatha) because, like those people of the confraternity of St. Agatha, they spent their lives from house to house (to prepare the celebrations). But the pastor was convinced of the necessity of giving the signs of faith to have people draw near and he was able to wait. During all that time they answered evil with good, putting up with the calumnies and the laughter of other people. When we went back, after two years, the pastor said to us: They have made us go through hell, but now if I announce that a new catechesis is beginning, the whole village comes. And in fact today there are five communities and the people are giving their

names in and want to enter. All this needed a lot of work and patience. But that's how it is: it's a road for the future.

This was the idea of the past catechesis: the necessity of giving the signs of faith: Love in the dimension of the cross and Unity. These are the signs the pagan world is waiting for because the other signs (the temple, the Mass, the priest, the bishop) are not strong enough signs for it; in fact, they presuppose faith. These signs are no longer valid in a secularized world like ours to call an atheist to faith. It's necessary to give new signs. It's true that in the parishes we are beginning a pastoral for the future; in fact, it looks ten years into the future.

The catechesis that we give today is a bit difficult, that in this catechesis you say that you are not sociologists or lecturers or anything like that. I always say that in order to analyze the sociological situation of the present Church we would need much more time. I say that what we are doing is only giving a few brushstrokes so that we may have some clearer ideas in order to enlighten what we will say in the following catecheses. In this catechesis what we are doing is excavating the ground in order to then put in the foundations of the building. In order to build a house, first you excavate for the foundations, you fill it with concrete and then you put up the load bearing wall and the other walls. Also here the same thing happens.

These first four catecheses are like digging the ground to put in the foundations of the house. They are catecheses that are an introduction to the catecheses proper, which will be done in dialogue with the people. It's necessary to give these catecheses first because otherwise the people would listen to you from their own point-of-view, from their own concepts. And you would find yourself unable to understand why, when talking about the Church, for example, you say one thing and the people understand and think a different one. You say "white" and the people understand "green." These are catecheses that serve to clarify terms and concepts that will be used later on. That's why it's necessary to give these catecheses in a very clear way in order to put those who are listening to you on the same ground.

This catechesis wants to look broadly at the present situation of the Church: what has happened to the Church and what is happening to her. It is a very interesting catechesis because the people undoubtedly believe that there is something happening in the Church, because they are changing their religion, they are changing their Mass and there are many problems. This catechesis wants to give a few brush strokes that may clarify the real situation of the Church of today a little bit.

In order to speak of the present situation of the Church, we must go back a bit because what's happening today has its roots in what happened twenty or thirty years ago or even much earlier.

I apologize to the people for the use of complicated and unusual words. Because for ordinary people with little

education, the terms used in this catechesis are big, incomprehensible words. But, on the other hand, we must express ourselves in some way.

Desacralization, dechristianization and crisis of faith are three aspects of one and the same reality. We divide this reality into these three aspects in order to better understand what is happening in the Church.

This catechesis is one of the first ones that I wrote down (I have written down very few) and back then when I did so, I used not say anything about natural religion, something which now instead I do. I have realized that it's necessary to clarify some ideas about the difference between natural religiosity and faith.

What is happening today inside the Church?

Desacralization

Desacralization means that the sense of the sacred, of the holy, has been lost. Inside the Church we notice a process of loss of the sense of the sacred. Odo Casel used to say that this could be noticed in the loss of the sense of worship, that is that the liturgy doesn't say anything to people anymore. It's a loss of the sense of the holy. That is to say, people no longer see God anywhere, they have lost the sense of God's presence in their work, the closeness of God in their family, etc. People worry about a lot of things, but they have lost the sense of the holy in their lives.

This has happened outside and inside the Church. It has happened also in ecclesiastical institutions. They too have lost this deep dimension of the holy. Why?

Our society is a post-war society. Society has suffered through two world wars that have traumatized it. The churchgoer must acknowledge today that all around him a very strange thing is happening, which is that man is changing. This was seen very clearly before the Council. The man who used to be in the Church before the Council saw that the people who were around him were different from those of before, new people. The world was being transformed in gigantic leaps. What was going on? A process of secularization.

The term "secularization" is ambiguous. On the one hand, it refers to something positive: people no longer have recourse to God and religion in an infantile way to solve some problems in their lives. This is what Bonhoeffer used to say: Man is becoming adult, in the sense that he now finds in science and technology the securities which he once childishly sought in God and religion. This is a positive sign of the times. But on the other hand, "secularization" refers to something negative: many people in our society, at least in practice, think they no longer need God and religion in their lives at all. They consider religion and the idea of God to be the need of a man who is still infantile. They think that an adult, developed and educated man can find total security for his life in science and technology (medicine, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, economics, etc.). In this second sense, "secularization" is

practically synonymous with atheism.¹ In the catecheses, from this context, it can be understood in which sense we are using the term.

The post-war generation has suffered a terrible disillusionment that has brought about a situation of anomie, that is, the values that were in force before no longer hold up. In this society two types of men have appeared: whom we can call a nihilistic man and a socialist man.

The first one, after all he has suffered during the wars, no longer believes in ideologies. He trusts only in work, in technology. Apart from the consequences of the two wars, the fact of living in an age in which technological progresses are enormous and science can give explanations that it was unable to give before also has an influence on him. This nihilistic man emerges from this trauma without believing in anything. He believes only in work and in technology. He is a man whom we can call secularized because he has become adult and no longer needs religion, for in science he has found the same securities that religion gave him before. He is a man who takes millions of pills and goes to the psychiatrist. He is a calculating, cold, hard-working, realistic, pragmatic man; he is interested in things only insofar as they are effective. He's not romantic. In politics, the prototype of this man would be Kennedy, who practiced a kind of politics devoid of ideology, based on solving concrete problems for which a group of specialists is gathered together, experts in the particular problem you have to deal with. He is a man who worked hard to put Europe, destroyed by the war, back on its feet; he took care of rebuilding the roads, the houses, the highways; he tried to rebuild Europe from the ruins and make a new Europe. This is the man whom we shall call secularized.

Why are we interested in knowing what is happening? Because, to a certain extent, we too are this man, even if we

1 CCC 2124: The name "atheism" covers many very different phenomena. One common form is the practical materialism which restricts its needs and aspirations to space and time. Atheistic humanism falsely considers man to be "an end to himself and the sole maker, with supreme control, of his own history" (GS 20 §1). Another form of contemporary atheism looks for the liberation of man through economic and social liberation. "It holds that religion, of its very nature, thwarts such emancipation by raising man's hopes in a future life, thus both deceiving him and discouraging him from working for a better form of life on earth" (GS 20 §2).

CCC 2125 Since it rejects or denies the existence of God, atheism is a sin against the virtue of religion (see Rom 1:18). The imputability of this offense can be significantly diminished in virtue of the intentions and the circumstances. "Believers can have more than a little to do with the rise of atheism. To the extent that they are careless about their instruction in the faith, or present its teaching falsely, or even fail in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than to reveal the true nature of God and of religion" (GS 19 §3).

are inside the Church. This nihilistic man, who is a man who studies a lot, is quite well-educated and who believes in science, is not willing anymore to listen to sermons or theories, or ideologies or religious talks. And so that gentleman who was tranquilly participating in Catholic Action, who had his own ideal of how to be militant and a pastoral concern, now finds himself with the problem that people don't listen to him anymore, don't pay attention to him anymore. He sees that what he offers, what he "sells," doesn't interest people anymore.

Another kind of man has emerged. There's not only this kind of man whom we meet at work, in our everyday lives, in the marketplace, wherever. Together with this man who believes in nothing, who goes to his job, who is concerned above all about being esteemed, being a good worker, there is another type of man who has put his religiosity into an ideal, which is the one of changing the structures in a technical way. He is a man whom we shall call a socialist man. He is the Marxist man, a very well organized man who believes that society can be changed by means of new structures and who fights to achieve this. This man is much more vulnerable than the former, at least apparently. This man is not willing to listen to sermons anymore, nor does he think of going to church because he thinks that the Church is a regression, an impediment to the modification of the structures and that religion is an obstacle preventing man from becoming adult and the master of the world, for man must dominate nature. And since he thinks that religion says that God is everything and man is nothing and that the only thing the religious man does is to beat his breast saying he is a sinner, without doing anything for others nor helping his fellow man who is suffering next to him, he believes that religion is an evil, that it has to be rooted out because it paralyzes man in his development toward the conquest of a new world.

It is obvious that a Christian of twenty or thirty years ago, in front of these two types of men, in front of this development that is taking place around him, in front of these two types of people who are no longer willing to listen to him, finds himself with an inferiority complex, since he is in a Church that is going through a difficult time, a Church that is, so to say, monolithic, still very dogmatic, an excessively ritualistic Church, a Church in which there is almost no Word of God because everything is in Latin, because it is practically forbidden to read the Bible, a Church in which the people are nourished above all with particular devotions, like the Sacred Heart, novenas, devotions to the saints, etc. This man has a very juridical theology and a very poor formation: usually, he has a formation for First Communion, after which came what they taught him at school or college in the class of "religious education" and little more. He is a man who underwent spiritual exercises and who perhaps goes to a priest for spiritual direction but who found himself in a very poor position for giving an answer to what has fallen on top of him: a world which is changing greatly, to which he has to give an answer.

So why does the Church become desacralized? Well, because the man who is in the Church cannot just sit there with his arms

folded in front of what is happening. What does he do, then? In his missionary impulse, trying in some way to bring Jesus Christ to the nihilistic, pragmatic-realistic, unbelieving, secularized man, as well as to the socialist man who is a militant in a political party and who is trying to change society because he is worried about hunger in India, who goes with banners on strikes and demonstrations, he (the Christian) lets himself be influenced by them. He tries to speak their same language and pays a very high price.

If the first man is a nihilistic man, basically a technical man, because he believes in science, because he believes in things only insofar as they are demonstrated in scientific progress, he believes that we get to the moon, in heart transplants, who believes that medicines will be improved, that man will achieve every goal, etc., this technical man who is not willing to listen, who is euphoric about his own achievements... what shall the one in the Church do in front of this man? He has understood that the only way of talking to him is using his same language: with science, with technology, etc. And so he begins to study psychology and sociology. And so you have all these priests studying psychology and buying tape recorders because one must keep oneself up-to-date, because it's necessary to be a technological and scientific man. If this man believes in sociology, then sees all those priests studying sociology... and like this, also those who are not priests. If this man believes in the most advanced science of the day, let's go to study that.

Studying psychology and sociology means immediately, in some way, to technicalize the Church. And so we see that at group meetings they begin to do questionnaires, they begin to do psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis enters into the seminaries. Everything begins to be technologized, group dynamics are discovered, etc. Because otherwise people won't pay any attention to you and won't work seriously.

And when we finally admitted it to ourselves, since the psychoanalysis of Freud says that religion is a neurosis, well, you can imagine... When we admitted it to ourselves, already we had paid a very high price because we had leaned on the idols of the world and Jesus Christ was nowhere to be seen. And if you go and talk to a priest, it may happen that he doesn't talk to you anymore about Jesus Christ, he kind of psychoanalyzes you. And then you learn that Tom has become secularized and got married and began to work as a psychiatrist. And Dick has set up I-don't-know-what-kind of community and has left. I suppose you've an experience of all this: friends of yours or people you know to whom something like this has happened.

In this sense there are Churches that have become extremely technicalized, that have studied a lot of psychology, sociology, group dynamics, "historiology"... and all that may be needed. And to be a priest it was necessary to be a well-educated man, learned in these fields and it was necessary to take tests and use a whole variety of techniques.

To approach the technical man it's necessary to conquer technology: then preaching on television, magazines, books, surveys, etc.: then Teilhard de Chardin is a extraordinary man,

an attempt to show that we, too, have a scientific scheme that solves the issue. But we see that the Catholic Church in America, the most technicalized, in a survey they made about conversions over the last twenty years, is the Church that has the lowest rate of conversions in America. On the other hand, the one with the highest rate is that of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who don't use any other techniques apart from that of the Acts of the Apostles, of personal contact, bringing their message from house to house.

What has happened with all this? We paid a very high price. Science and technology certainly have their own role, but we have believed that they could be a substitute for Jesus Christ. For example, psychology has also made us doubt and when we realized this, we lost the profound sense of the mystery of God in our lives. We studied the saints from a psychological point-of-view and we applied psychology to everything. We made sociological studies of the parish and we studied group dynamics and psychotechnology, trying to discover who the outcasts are and who those who dedicate themselves to destroy are, etc.

Faced with the socialist man, using his same techniques, we made his same mistake. If the socialist was organized in groups, in cells of revolutionary worker's action, we thought: perhaps they're right! And we, too, created our Catholic workers' cells. If they speak a lot about justice, we are not going to do less. The difference between the first and the second is that the first do not pray while the second do. But something very important happens: what gathers, what holds these Catholic groups of social action together, is social action, revolutionary action, changing the structures, the fact of recognizing that man is oppressed by unjust structures, etc. And each group understands this in its own way because there are groups that are more extremist and others which are less. But all of them gather around action and substitute the risen Jesus Christ, the only one who gathers together and summons the Church, the one who establishes all of us as Servant of Yahweh, the Just One, with social action. In these groups, Christianity is just a varnish.

Final result: a state of confusion in the Church so that you no longer know which groups are Catholic and which are not. There is no difference. Generally the most serious people in these groups of social activist Catholic Action end up joining the socialist groups, becoming secularized and leaving the Church. Why? Because these groups are better organized, because in order to do politics you have to be very seriously organized. Those Catholic groups began almost as a game and were not very organized. They met in the parish, but little by little they realized that, in order to do a more serious and deep work, a more serious organization was needed. So they find out that the first thing to be done is study economics and politics and they do this because it is very easy to talk and talk, but then they feel frustrated because "we need to do something. What's the use of talking so much here in the parish without doing anything so that people won't die of hunger?"

These groups are constantly bombarded by everything that's going on outside. And since serious revolutionary action is not

done without hatred, these groups end up as they end up. And by criticizing, criticizing, when they realize it, they've injected hatred in their own bodies (in order to push the people against those who govern and against the systems that oppress them hatred is necessary). By now the only thing they do is to criticize, beginning with the bishop down to the last guy. And they become desacralized. The liturgy vanishes because it's a waste of time. No songs because we are not feasting, we are mourning for the injustice suffered by our oppressed brothers and sisters. They lose the Christian foundation of the Church's social doctrine, which tries above all to change the heart of man, which is the source of unjust structures.

These are facts that we suffered through at those two levels. Behind all this, there is a good intention of catechizing today's man, getting near him, getting to his level, but, without us realizing it, instead of us catechizing him, they had catechized us: we have accepted his ways of looking at reality.

I asked groups of this kind: But according to you, what is it that makes man suffer? And they answered: It's obvious, not having enough money to eat, not having enough money to get to the end of the month. That at the end of the month he doesn't have money, doesn't have the car he would like, is living in a small house, etc...., but nothing about suffering in the spiritual order.

In Florence, at the time of the Isolotto affair, we came in contact with many groups of this kind. We used to attend meetings held by the dissenting groups of the parish, which were opposing the structure of the Church. Lots of these groups are led by a priest who has studied a lot of psychology and who has read a lot and who is the one who manipulates them. It's terrible, I assure you, to listen to these groups.

(Carmen)

In the catechesis it's not necessary to go into all these details. We're telling them to you so that you know this is a problem that you're going to find in many places: this phenomenon is already universal. That one of the Isolotto affair is a situation that has become common. That was something that highlighted a problem in the Church that is universal and real. When they begin to speak, we already know where they are going and where they come from because this is one of the biggest problems that exists today.

(Kiko)

Unjust structures, which certainly have to be changed, come out from the heart of man. That's why Jesus Christ says: what stains man is not what comes from the outside but what is inside the heart of man (see Mk 7:14-23).² I disagree with those who

² CCC 1853: ...The root of sin is in the heart of man, in his free will, according to the teaching of the Lord: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft,

think the opposite because this is to consider man a very little thing, as if he were a robot that can be manipulated through a structure. It's true that it's possible to manipulate man and brainwash him, but if I really believed that this is what oppresses man so it's necessary to change the structure for man to become holy, then I would be fighting for this. If I believed, like the Marxists, that what makes man suffer is his socioeconomic reality, that is, that man does not earn enough or, rather, that the product which he earns through his work is stolen from him by his company and that is precisely what destroys him, alienates him and in the same way what alienates the boss is precisely what he steals from the workers, I would try to free man by means of a new system.

It is true that this destroys man, but it's not just this. Man is much more than this, he is not only a socioeconomic reality. If I believed that what destroys man are principally his maternal or paternal complexes, I would be a psychiatrist and I would do psychoanalysis. But in neither case would I be here wasting my time. If I preach Jesus Christ earnestly it's because he is the only way that saved me. It was not psychology or anything of the kind that saved me, but Jesus Christ who has made it possible that, in this moment, I may accept myself and others and lead a happy life in a dimension that I was unable to live before. If I am a Christian, it is because the only one who saved me was one called Jesus. He gave me a vision of reality, he told me that what really alienates man is not only his socioeconomic or psychological reality (and anyway science will discover many more flaws in man and other fetters), but what oppresses man radically is sin.

But today, if you speak explicitly of sin, many people laugh in your face because the world has become secularized. You have to get there in another way: saying that man, because of the fear he has of death, because he has experienced death, is a slave to sin.

I know very well that it's useless to change a society externally if you don't change the people. It's useless to change the structures if, you don't take away selfishness from people, from the deep bottom of their hearts, that is, the fact that his "I" is the center of the universe, that his navel is the axis of the world, that he is the king of the universe, that he doesn't accept things unless they are as he thinks they should be. From the selfish heart of man come out thefts, murders, adulteries, fornications and all the rest.

With this we don't want to take away any merit from others or deny other charisms that may exist in the world. I'll give you an example so that you may understand better.

One day in the Bunsen factory in Palomeras, near the place where Carmen had her shack, a pipe carrying ammonia exploded and a great cloud of gas began to come out through the shacks. People began to faint and their eyes to water. It was very dangerous for those who were ill. People were asphyxiating and

false witness, slander. These are what defile a man" (Mt 15:19-20).

3rd Day: Desacralization, dechristianization, crisis of faith

there was a terrible chaos. José Agudo surely remembers it. People were screaming because their eyes were burning a lot. Some immediately began to evacuate the people, putting the more seriously injured in the ambulances, taking them to the hospital. Firemen arrived too. Think one thing: if there had not been someone who went through the cloud of ammonia, risking his life, to go and patch up the hole in the pipe where the gas was coming out, we would have spent our lives picking people up and taking them to hospital. If you don't do this, the problem is solved only superficially.

It's just what we were saying. From where do the thefts, the murders, the injustices in the world come? From the heart of man. This is the poisonous hole that has to be patched. The other things that they do are just superficial solutions to the situation.

About this, there is a catechesis in the Gospel (see Lk 12:13-15). A man came up to Jesus and said to him: "Tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." It's the same as if people said to the Church: "Tell the Americans, who have so much money, to share their money with those who have less of it and are hungry." This man who approaches Jesus Christ is left without a penny because his brother has taken everything away. Jesus answers him: "Who has appointed me as a divider of your goods?" And he continues: "Beware of every avarice because life is not ensured by the abundance of goods."

Jesus Christ goes to the root of the issue. When someone is capable of stealing all the money from his blood brother and the other is capable of accusing him to recover it, why do they do it? Jesus Christ says: You are both mistaken because you both believe that life comes to you from riches. They are both idolaters, for life is not ensured by the abundance of goods. To the first Jesus says: You are deceived because you are capable of killing someone to have money, because for you money is your god and your life. And to the other: You are deceived because, having been robbed, becoming poor, you are capable of denouncing your brother, looking for influential people to get him to share the money, all this because you, too, believe that life is ensured by money.

For us, what is the radical problem of man, what is the deep evil? We were saying this when talking about Adam and Eve. Man is a slave because of the fear of death that he has. That's why he is seeking life. Everything is based on this. In the gospel you will find that the word "life" constantly appears. "Life is not ensured by the abundance of goods," says Jesus and he tells a parable (see Lk 12:16-21). A man had many goods and fields. One year he had a great harvest and said to himself: "What shall I do? I will demolish all my granaries, I will build bigger ones, I will enlarge my storerooms, I will work twenty hours a day to store all the harvest." He does this and finally he has an immense harvest, enormous granaries and lots of money. Then he said to his soul: "Rest, eat, feast, enjoy yourself because you have goods in abundance." The Lord says: "Fool, this very night your soul will be asked of you! You have worked sweating like a slave, you have spent three months without sleeping, making everybody works at your pace and then you said:

3rd Day: Desacralization, dechristianization, crisis of faith

'Now eat, drink, feast.' Fool! This night your soul will be asked of you; for whom will all that you have worked for be? Surely for your grandchildren who will squander it all."

Man is enslaved by the fear he has of death. He has experienced death because he ate from the tree, which is a symbol of sin; he is afraid of death and seeks life. Man exists because God loves him; God gives man his being by loving him. The evil one says to man (see Gen 3): God does not love you; you will not die if you eat of the tree. On the contrary, God knows very well that the day you eat of the tree you will be like him, knowing good and evil and for this reason he doesn't allow you to eat. God does not want you to eat because he is jealous and he doesn't want you to be like him. Eve accepts this catechesis that the evil one gives her, that God is not love, that he is jealous, but he has imposed natural law on man to limit him so that he may not fulfill himself like he does, so that he cannot reach his maximum potential. Eve accepts this catechesis and sees that the fruit is good, desirable to the eyes and marvelous for obtaining knowledge and she eats.

Eve is you and me. To eat, to sin, is to make a sign, a "sacrament," with which we say "Amen" to the catechesis of the evil one. When you, I, whoever, sins, we accept that God does not exist, that God is not love.

But since the truth is that we exist inasmuch as God loves us, if we accept that God does not love us: who created us? Who are we? We immediately stop being. Man feels completely lost. We experience, at a deep existential level, ontic death, the absurdity of our very life. By sinning, man loses his "axis mundi," loses the profound dimension of being, experiences ontic death, so to say, feels himself encircled by the fear of death. Physical suffering turns into a symbol that announces the destruction of his entire reality.

Notice that God has not withdrawn from man because, if it were so, man would die immediately. It is man who has withdrawn from God; man, who by sinning has accepted the catechesis of the evil one and feels himself separated from God and without meaning. God is always with him and saves him.

Because of this experience, man finds himself encircled by death and from this moment on he seeks life. Since to be means to be loved (man exists insofar as God loves him), if he accepts that God does not love him, what happens? Man strives to live. To die means not to be loved; to exist means to be loved by others. From this moment on man seeks life in love. That's why money and affection are so linked, as psychology says today. Man, in making money, is trying to gain prestige, he is trying to ensure that he is loved, he is trying to be, he is seeking life. That's why Jesus Christ says: Beware of all greed, life is not ensured by the abundance of goods. Man seeks life in goods.

I am saying this because if we accept this catechesis, who can be saved? If sin is what keeps man chained, JESUS CHRIST COMES TO FORGIVE SINS, TO SAVE, TO SNATCH MAN OUT OF THIS SITUATION OF SLAVERY, TO OVERCOME THE DEATH THAT IS ENCIRCLING HIM.

Thus injustices are explained. If man is like that, inevitably he will try to exploit and steal from others to make money and ensure his life. But if you give this man eternal life, through the power of Jesus Christ, you free him from death, he is given the possibility of not committing injustices any more. You have taken from his heart the source of his injustices.

This is what we preach. Some people tell us that we don't do politics, that we don't get involved in the temporal sphere. We do the true politics, which is to establish justice on earth. Is Jesus Christ perhaps separate from politics? Jesus Christ is the Just One. He will teach justice to the nations, as the Scriptures say (see Is 42:1-3). He is the Servant chosen to teach justice to the nations. Does doing politics mean only to belong to the Phalangist party or to the communists? That's what it seems like. We have such a total lack of education...

I believe that in the catechesis it's not necessary to enter much into too many details.

I summarize this first point: there is a process of DESACRALIZATION within the Church coming from the attempt to reply to the new man who is emerging all around us, a secularized man, a technical man, who no longer comes to Church, who believes in science, etc. The people who were inside the Church tried, in their missionary impulse, to imitate this man's techniques in order to bring him to the Gospel. And faced with the socialist man we have imitated his methods too. And we realized that, instead of us catechizing them, they had catechized us.

DECHRISTIANIZATION

We give this name to a process that we notice in the Church, within her, of the loss of the Christian sense. This is one aspect, a brush stroke, as we said. We call dechristianization a manifest divorce between religion and life that we observe in the people. This very thing, with the same words, the Pope spoke of in one of his Wednesday audiences: the divorce between religion and life.

These are those people who go to Mass on Sundays and also to Communion, but in whom all this has no influence in their lives. They go on being the same bourgeois they have always been. Today this type of people is called "petit bourgeois." They are those men whose ideals are: honesty at work, security for their family, to have a television, for their children to study at university, to have a good reputation, to live well, trying to avoid problems. This man leads a miserable life, without ever risking anything. Above all is his family and that his son may have a good career. This is a hard-working and very honest man.

For many people Christian values have been reduced to this. I don't know if you see what I mean. This gentleman who is a Christian and goes to Mass will never say to his son: Son, seek God. Not at all! He will say to him: Study, son, study, this is what's most important. He will never say to him: Seek the meaning of your life; if you need to have an experience of work,

then work. Perhaps he will say this with his mouth, but deep down what's important to him is that his son should study hard and get the best grades, because his son is his son. His son exists in function of him.

In practice, this man is not a Christian. For him to go to Mass is a tranquilizer, a varnish, it "fits well." He is such a coward that he would never dare to become an atheist because they say it's not a good thing. And besides, he is very afraid in case there is afterlife... he wants to cover all his bases.

This man is you and me. This man is not far from here.

Yes, there are many Masses in the parishes, many Communion, whatever you like, but perhaps you don't find a lived Christianity. One reads the Gospel and thinks it's a Utopia. This man says to you: No, no, the Gospel is very good, but... I'm not Jesus Christ, nor a saint. Let's not blame this man because he is you and me.

This divorce between religion and life is very serious because it makes those we were speaking about in the first part laugh, those pragmatic men who do not believe in fairy-tales. Perhaps this happens less in Spain than in Italy, but it is terrible.

Rejecting this type of man, his son becomes a leftist or a hippie and his father gets frightened. You know about the hippie movement in America; it is a reaction of the children against their parents. The parents do not offer their children anything that interests them. Everything that the father may offer his son nauseates him because his father's life, deep down, is a failed life. For he is a man who works very hard, who has closed himself in his own world, who has his own ideas and is very disenchanted because of the post-war situation. This man never speaks of God. You, yourselves, before you were in this Way, think how often you spoke about God. Maybe he will speak about God in a bigoted way, but about God on an existential and historical level, no. Why? Because deep down he is not a Christian.

We find ourselves in a situation in which we have not been adequately catechized, Christianized. There has been no real initiation into faith. We have had a catechesis for our First Communion. Then some of us studied religion as a subject at school and so we are still wearing our First Communion dress under our shirt. This dress is small. What is this small dress? The ten commandments, to believe in dogmas and not much more. The commandments? Do not steal, do not kill, etc. I keep them already. To believe the dogmas? I don't understand a word of them, but I believe. That the Virgin Mary was a Virgin? I believe it. I believe everything Holy Mother Church tells me. That Christ died for our sins? I believe it. Go to Confession every now and then? Of course. We all are very bourgeois and comfortable and we usually go to the twelve o'clock Mass.

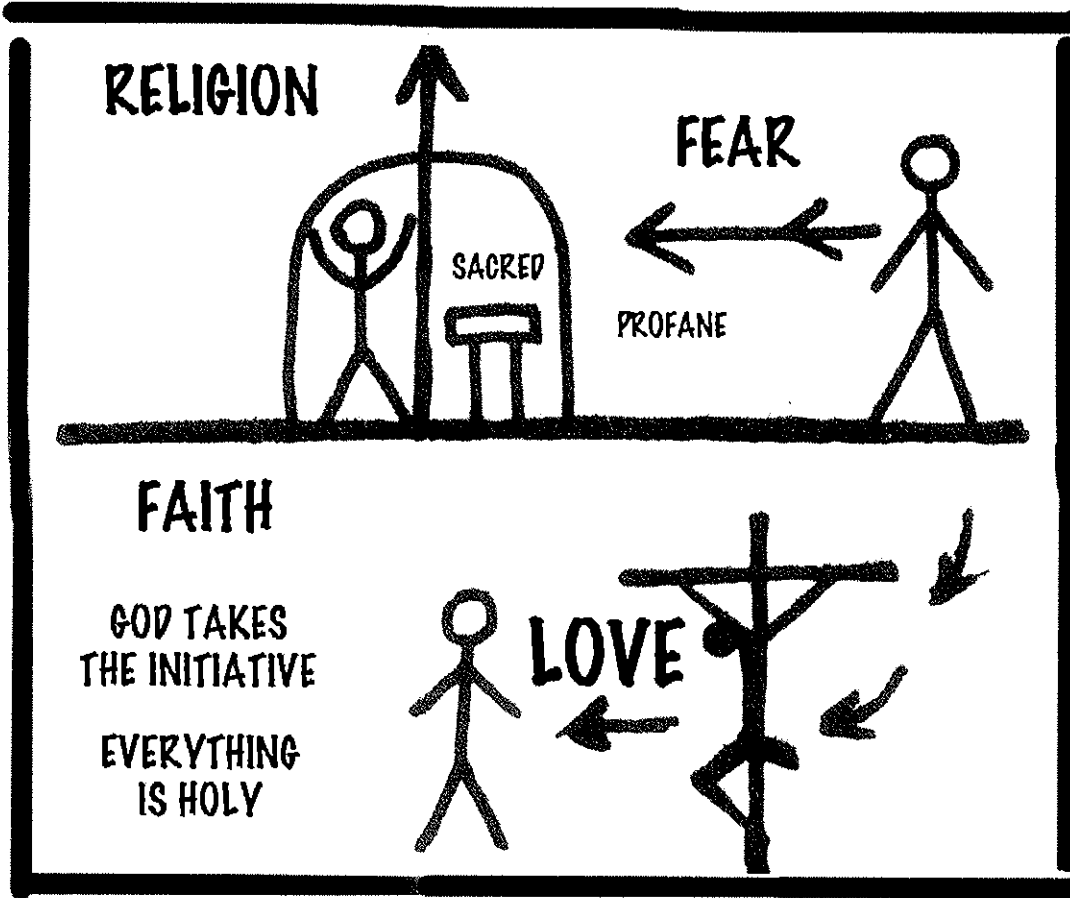
It's not a matter of saying this to the people in this way. It is to you that I am saying this. The fact is that we have become adults without having anyone who made us mature in faith, without ever having heard the word Abraham heard. God came to meet him and set him on a journey with a Word: "Leave your land

and your kinsfolk and go towards a land I will give you" (see Gn 12:1).

This is where I speak of natural religiosity.

So many people are living their Christianity basically at a religious level, at a level of natural religiosity.

In itself, natural religiosity, that is, the natural relationship of man with God, is something good, like everything that is natural. But man, because of sin, corrupts it, trying to put God at the service of his own selfishness. In the catecheses I am referring to such natural religiosity corrupted by sin.



In order to speak of natural religiosity I do a drawing, because in order to understand a bit what it means to live Christianity at a level of natural religiosity, it's necessary to explain briefly what religion and natural religiosity are. Religiosity is one thing and faith is another.³

3 CCC 28: In many ways, throughout history down to the present day, men have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behavior: in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations and so forth. These forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a religious being.

3rd Day: Desacralization, dechristianization, crisis of faith

Every man who has come to this world has felt the need to find an explanation for who he is. Man found himself confronted by phenomena that surpassed him: storms, illness, death, etc. and he had the need to shelter himself, to protect himself, to contain, to restrain in some way, these powers which were superior to him. He needs too to find an explanation for why his son got ill and died. He needs to explain who he is and who the other people are. But above all, he needs, to make himself in some way secure, to have some securities, because otherwise he feels defenseless in the face of a hostile nature.

From the moment man appears on earth, the traces of religion appear too. And so atheism is what we should study as an extraordinary phenomenon, not religiosity.

All the rock paintings, like the caves of Altamira, have a religious connotation. The caveman draws the bison because he thinks that by drawing bison he will hunt down more bison. And he draws hunting scenes because, through mimicry, they may be reproduced in reality. Like when at home you break a vase and you think that something awful will happen to you. It is a sense of magic. Magic begins with mimicry and a sense of likeness. Since man depended on hunting to the point that if he didn't hunt he would die and he can't accept the fact of not surviving, of dying of hunger, he tries to defend himself from these superior and mysterious realities that dominate him. The same thing happens if he has a field of potatoes, he will try to shelter himself from a frost that would destroy his crop. Man doesn't accept insecurity. Because he needs to work and to live in peace. He needs to shelter himself from illness, from storms, from calamities, from cyclones, etc. So he will try in any possible way to offer services to the author of all these things

CCC 29: But this "intimate and vital bond of man to God" (GS 19,1) can be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected by man (GS 19 §1). Such attitudes can have different causes: revolt against evil in the world; religious ignorance or indifference; the cares and riches of this world; the scandal of bad example on the part of believers; currents of thought hostile to religion; finally, that attitude of sinful man which makes him hide from God out of fear and flee his call (see GS 19-21; Mt 13:22; Gen 3:8-10; Jon 1:3).

CCC 843: The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life" (LG 16; see NA 2; EN 53).

CCC 844: In their religious behavior, however, men also display the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them: "Very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and served the creature rather than the Creator. Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair (LG 16; see Rom 1:21, 25).

3rd Day: Desacralization, dechristianization, crisis of faith

so that they will not be adverse to him; in some way he makes a contract with the one who is behind all these strange events because he thinks that behind all these things there is "a powerful hand," as the gypsies say, someone who has created everything and directs it. Since man puts everything in order with his reason, he imagines a superior organizing mind that dominates everything, or else he divinizes the powers of nature, in order to be able to worship them and put them at his service.

In order to find shelter from calamities, it's necessary to find a place where one can dialogue with this organizing mind, with the absolute master of blizzards, of sickness, etc. This is how natural religion is born. When man finds a mountain, a rock which provokes terror in him because it seems to him that it has fallen from the heavens (all religions have holy mountains and rocks), he believes that he has found the place where God is closer and will be able to listen to him better. Whenever man has found an "axis mundi" (an axis which links earth to heaven) he immediately creates a religion, builds a temple, sets up an altar and makes a priest to serve as an intermediary. He has found a place where he can say: My son is sick, save him; or: I have spent all my savings to buy five pigs and I promise you that, if this year none of them die like they did last year when I almost went broke, I will go barefoot to the valley and back, even if I am left with no feet. And he does it. Man has done these things since the dawn of history. If you save my son... I promise to light fifty candles for a whole year. This has happened to you and me and has happened to man always.

When man discovers this superior Being or beings, he needs to propitiate them. Religion appears (religion comes from "religatio," to unite God to man.) Man erects an altar there where the superior Being pays attention to him; a pure altar, the most perfect stone. There he brings cakes and burns them; he brings animals and sacrifices them so that their sweet smell may rise up to God. He thinks: Since I've taken a lamb which cost me a lot of money and offered it to him, He will give me an abundance of other things in return. You can find this in all religions. These are the rudiments of religiosity.

Little by little, things become complicated and religions degenerate. Since many people go to pray, to ask for things and to offer other ones in exchange, you need someone to take care of the temple. So some priests are put in place. The temple is full of people, especially when there are calamities.

I remember that catastrophe near Catania when Mount Etna began to erupt. Rivers of lava were flowing down to the villages, destroying everything forever. So all the villages were taking their saints out of the churches and organizing processions with the Blessed Sacrament. And they prayed for hours on end: Lord, stop the lava. And how could they not do this? Let's not say stupidities: they would have lost all their houses, lands, vineyards and olive groves. All the people were there praying for the lava to stop. And it stopped before it got to the village. On occasions like this, everyone joins together to pray to God and they do penance and ask for forgiveness because they say that God is angry. They think that when he is

angry with them he shakes the volcano and punishes them. There is this in all religions.

In this religious scheme, what is sacrosanct is the temple and all that is connected with it, the altar, the priest and everything that is offered to God. In this way, a big difference between these things that are pure and everything else that is impure is set up.

So I say: is this scheme the one of Christianity? What I have described are only the rudiments of religiosity that become more perfect as history develops. Is this what Christianity is? Certainly not. Let us see.

In Christianity there is neither temple, nor altar, nor priests, in the way they're understood by natural religiosity.

There is no temple in the sense of one unique, sacrosanct place where sacred worship is carried out, the house of God, where he dwells exclusively, while the rest are profane places. In Christianity, we Christians are the temple. The Samaritan woman says to Jesus: "Where must we adore God, on Mount Garazim (as the Samaritans say) or in the Temple of Jerusalem?" And Jesus says: the true worshipers are coming, those whom my Father desires. They will not worship any longer on Mount Garazim nor on Mount Sion, but in spirit and truth (see Jn 4:20-24). Jesus Christ also says: I shall destroy this temple and rebuild it in three days, referring to the temple of his body (see Jn 2:19-22). In fact, in Christianity Christ is the temple. And where is Christ? In the Church. But the Church is not the stone temple; the Church is us Christians. We are the living temple of the Holy Spirit.⁴

In the same way, in Christianity there is no altar in the naturally religious sense of a sacred stone which no one can come close to, much less touch. Those of you who have lived Christianity at the level of natural religiosity may have some experience of this: when you went to Mass you always stayed at the back of the church and if you happened to sit near the tabernacle, you felt your heart miss a beat because you were approaching the untouchable, the place where the sacred is. We Christians do not have altars in this sense because the holy

4 CCC 845: To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is "the world reconciled". She is that bark which "in the full sail of the Lord's cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world." According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood (St. Augustine, Sermon. 96, 7, 9: PL 38, 588; St. Ambrose, De virg. 18, 118: PL 16, 297B; see already 1 Pt 3:20-21).

CCC 1197: Christ is the true temple of God, "the place where his glory dwells"; by the grace of God, Christians also become temples of the Holy Spirit, living stones out of which the Church is built.

stone is Christ, the only cornerstone (see 1 Pt 2:4).⁵ That's why we can celebrate the Eucharist on a suitable table and we can celebrate in a square, in the countryside or wherever it is suitable. We don't have a particular place where exclusively we should celebrate our worship.

Nor do we have priests in the sense of natural religiosity, that is, people whom we separate from all the others so that in our name they may get in contact with the divinity. In Christianity the only and eternal priest, the one who intercedes for us is Christ (see the Letter to the Hebrews).⁶ And since we are his Body, all of us are priests. So all the Church is priestly and intercedes for the world (common priesthood of the faithful). It is true that this priesthood is made visible in a ministry and that there are some brothers who are ordained as servants of this priesthood, ministers of the priesthood of Christ, who act "in the person of Christ the Head," who are sign-person of Christ the head (ministerial priesthood).⁷ In the New Testament the word "priest" is not used, except for when it refers to Christ and to the Christians (e.g. see 1 Pt 2:4-5). For those whom we call priests, it uses the terms "ministers," "presbyters," "bishops," etc.

But the most important aspect of natural religion is that it has a scheme that works from the bottom up. It is man's attempt to shelter himself in some way from disasters. In religiosity man tries to use God for his ideal of happiness. This is the important point. He wants his daughter to behave, his cattle to become fat, to have a lot of money. And to achieve these things, he tries to use God. In Christianity it's not like this. Christianity does not begin from the initiative of man who has invented it. Christianity is the other way around. It comes from heaven. It is God who takes the initiative⁸. If you read the

5 CCC 1383: The altar, around which the Church is gathered in the celebration of the Eucharist, represents the two aspects of the same mystery: the altar of the sacrifice and the table of the Lord. This is all the more so since the Christian altar is the symbol of Christ himself, present in the midst of the assembly of his faithful, both as the victim offered for our reconciliation and as food from heaven who is giving himself to us...

6 CCC 1545: The redemptive sacrifice of Christ is unique, accomplished once for all; yet it is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. The same is true of the one priesthood of Christ; it is made present through the ministerial priesthood without diminishing the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood: "Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers" (St. Thomas Aquinas, Hebr. 8, 4).

7 For a better understanding of the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood and the essential differences between them, one being ordained for the other, see LG 10; CCC 1546-1553.

8 CCC 2567 God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God

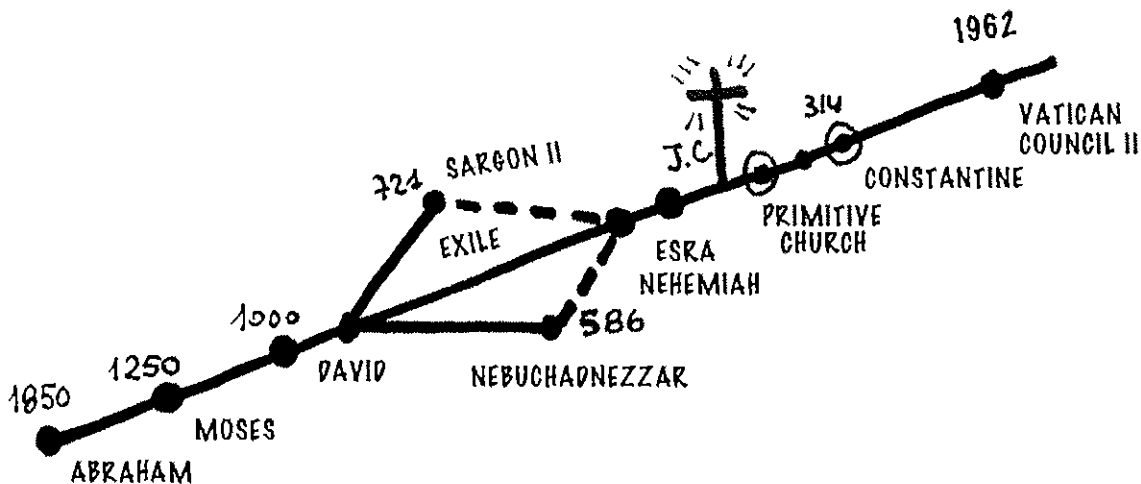
Old Testament you will see that, deep down, it is already the attempt of God to free man from his religious selfishness, from the perversion he has made of religion, from the attempt man made to get hold of God and put him at his service. For this reason, in the Bible God appears to Abraham and says to him: Start walking. God is the one who takes the initiative. And when the people forget God, he intervenes with power to call them to conversion. In natural religiosity, when things are going well, man does not worry about God; but when some misfortune happens, he runs to the temple. The same happens to you: you go on vacation and don't even go to Mass or remember it. Instead, if a daughter of yours gets sick...

In Christianity the initiative comes from God because Jesus Christ comes from the Father, who sends him to us. And in Christianity man does not put God at his benefit and service, but on the contrary, he puts himself at the service of God; he serves God. A Christian will not necessarily ask God for the healing of an illness because for him sickness has a new meaning: it is not an evil, because for a Christian everything is grace and everything is love. Suffering signifies evil only for the pagans. This attitude of considering suffering as grace is not to be confused with the stoic attitude of resignation that has entered Christianity. In Christianity it is God who marks out the way. Happiness does not come to you from health, but from the fact that God loves you and has made himself your brother, from the fact that God is with you.

This is a little bit of the difference between Christianity and natural religiosity.

The process of dechristianization, the divorce between Christianity and life, comes from the fact that natural religiosity has infiltrated Christianity.

In order to understand how this has happened, we will draw a diagram of the history of salvation.



tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer...

3rd Day: Desacralization, dechristianization, crisis of faith

The history of salvation begins with Abraham around 1850 BC. Then more or less in 1250 it is estimated that Moses and the Exodus occur, then David in 1000. After David, the kingdom of the North (Israel) and the kingdom of the South (Judah) separate. Both of them go into exile, the first with Sargon II and the other with Nebuchadnezzar. Then with Cyrus they return from the exile to the Promised Land. Ezra and Nehemiah reconstruct Judaism and a little later we arrive at the time of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the whole Old Testament, God has been progressively purifying man, beginning from where he was. Abraham is a polytheist, a naturally religious man and God makes him leave his land and opens a way for him.

Finally, Christianity is born with the risen Jesus Christ, who appears to the apostles and gathers them together, because the cross of Jesus Christ had denounced all the apostles as sinners, who had abandoned him and scattered. He comes to them again. They were coming back from fishing and he was on the shore of the lake preparing breakfast for them. He gives them the Holy Spirit, who is his own Spirit, who generates a new creation in them. He makes them children of God and constitutes them as his Church, which is the Body of Jesus Christ risen.

The primitive Church appears as small Christian communities in which Christ is alive through the Holy Spirit. Christ has been constituted by God as Life-giving Spirit, has a spiritual form and lives in them and unites them. He has destroyed in them the body of sin, of selfishness and has given them his own life, a new life, which the Father has given him and which he can transmit to others, making them children of God and brothers and sisters of his. This is what constituted the primitive Church.

This Church strongly creates the signs of faith and makes the pagans say: Look how they love one another. Because this Spirit is fundamentally love.

But there comes a historical moment, brought about by the signs coming from these communities, in which the Emperor Constantine promulgates peace for the Church (314). God allows that, after three centuries, the Church, which has been prepared in a kind of novitiate, may face a great task, the one of announcing this great news to entire masses of people: Jesus Christ has been raised from death and constituted by the Father as Lord of everything which destroys us. He is the Savior of the nations. And the concrete way in which God permits this to happen is that entire masses enter the Church.

But it is important to keep in mind that these masses enter the Church with all their natural religiosity, with all their religious schemes. And whereas, at first, there had been a catechumenate of three or four years to enter the Church, a catechumenate that was an initiation into faith, now this catechumenate could no longer be done because people enter en masse. The catechumenate overflows. Then what they do is to gradually Christianize the pagan religious schemes that people have.

If on every mountain there was a temple to Venus, or Apollo, or whoever it was, does the Church pull down the temple?

3rd Day: Desacralization, dechristianization, crisis of faith

No. What she does is take away the statue of Jupiter and put up one of Jesus Christ. In Sicily we have seen pagan temples, dating from before Christ, transformed into churches. So instead of worshipping and having feasts for their gods as they were accustomed to, the people worships and has feasts in honor of Jesus Christ because people cannot live without worshipping. So starting with the people's pagan worship, the Church will bring them to Christianity. So that the people would not suffer a divorce between the celebrations they used to have in their pagan life and the Christian celebrations (they had celebrated these feasts from when they were little and they have a great power of catechization), what the Church did was to catechize through the feasts, substituting feasts with a Christian content on the same dates of the pagan ones. So for example, the pagans used to celebrate the feast of the sun on December 25th, the winter solstice, when the sun begins to appear higher on the horizon and this was a great feast. The Church put the feast of Christmas on this date. And this happened again a few years ago. On May 1st, the civil feast of the workers, the Church put the feast of St. Joseph the Worker so as to celebrate in a Christian way what the non-Christians celebrate.

In that specific period of time it was necessary for the Church to bring the announcement to the nations through a pastoral for the masses so that they would hear the announcement of Christianity, which is in fact what happened.

Today we are living in a different epoch in which the masses are leaving the Church. This is very important: if you look at the situation in Europe, you will see that there are very few nations that are still Catholic. The whole of Scandinavia and all the countries of Eastern Europe have left the Church. Germany, Italy and France are already secular states, where Christians are already or are becoming a minority.

We are living in this period of transition and we are coming from a Christianity lived at a very religious level. The same thing that God did with the people of Israel (that is, that he did not destroy its natural religiosity, but he progressively purified it, especially during the exile when he purified its sacrificial rituals) the Church has done with the nations. God did not begin by refusing the sacrifices of goats and cows, but he began from there to lead his people to a purer liturgy and spirituality. He progressively sublimated these bloody sacrifices so that when Jesus Christ arrives, Jewish spirituality was not as much based on the sacrifices of cows and bulls as fundamentally on the Jewish Passover, which is a feast celebrated at a family level, which is a sacrifice of praise and an oblation. The Church has done the same thing.

There was an age when Christianity was mostly lived at a very religious level, but today we are entering a different epoch and more than ever we need to pass to a Christianity lived in adult faith and less at the level of natural religiosity.

And what is faith? A meeting with Jesus Christ risen.⁹ Faith, says The Letter to the Hebrews (see Heb 11:1), is the guarantee of what we hope for. It would be interesting to know who here has the guarantee of what he hopes for. What is it that we hope for? Eternal life. What is a guarantee? It is a down payment, a check that a guy gives you and that you have in your wallet and you know that this guarantees that tomorrow you can go to the bank and they will give you twenty-five thousand dollars. Faith is a guarantee. We thought faith was only to adhere to some abstract truths, to believe in certain things only intellectually. This is where the confusion comes from. Some people think that Christianity is to believe some truths on a rational level. For Israel this is not faith.¹⁰ Now we are entering into a marvelous epoch in which to be Christian will no longer be only to adhere to some truths. Christianity is not an ensemble of truths that exist statically and which you have to believe and discover, as if God were a static being. The Church is an event that comes forth. The event is that Christ is alive and goes on manifesting himself to people and transforms them. This is what the Church is. The Church is an event that happens in history. The Church is not brought into being by studying. The Church is not to discover things. **THE CHURCH IS CHRIST RISEN, LIVING IN THE MIDST OF MEN.** The marvel is that, over the course of the centuries, the Church has not died. And why has she not died? Because Christ is alive and risen and he calls people. Because the initiative comes from Jesus Christ and these people will continue to transform history and the world.

Jesus Christ is present, is risen. The Church is an event that continues to happen. For this reason you who preach are an event, you are an historical fact: people who are wasting their time, their lives, to preach. Why are you doing it? Am I or is someone else paying you? You are doing it because in some way Jesus Christ has met you and is transforming you. This is faith: the meeting with Jesus Christ risen.

This meeting, says St. Paul, consists of the fact that this Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God (see Rm 8:16). This is what faith is: the witness of Jesus Christ, life-giving Spirit, to our spirit that we are children of God. When this meeting is brought forth in your spirit, faith is brought forth. You feel yourself a child of God and you feel life because God is your Father. That's why St. Paul constantly

⁹ CCC 153: "...Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. "Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth'" (DV 5).

¹⁰ CCC 839: "...The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rom 9:4-5); "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).

says that what shows us that we are children of God is that we call God "Daddy" (see Rm 8:15), that is, that we have trust in God as in a father.

Earlier I forgot something about natural religion that's very important. All natural religiosity is based on awe, on the sense of fear. Christianity, instead, is based on love. What does fear mean? That we are afraid of illness, of chastisements. But in Christianity, says St. Paul, you have not received the spirit of slaves to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit through which you can say to God "Daddy," "Abba" (see Rm 8:15).

To have this trust in God, to have this love for God as for a father, is like the trust a child of four or five years has in his father. When you have a four-year old child, you hardly ever scold him; he is very lovely and makes you laugh; he throws his arms around your neck and smothers you with kisses. At that time he calls you "Daddy"; later on he will call you "Father."

This absolute trusting that God loves you, because he has shown you this in Jesus Christ, is faith. Because Jesus Christ has shown you this: that God is mercy and love. If you have within yourself that Spirit of Jesus Christ, you feel within yourself an infinite love for the Father and such trust that it makes you see everything that is in the world as grace and love. For everything that happens happens for your good, because a leaf doesn't fall from a tree without your Father knowing about it (see Mt 10:29). It's difficult to find a Christian who says "my Father" when referring to God. Instead, whenever Jesus refers to God, he does it like that. And the first Christians used to say the same thing: we have a Father in heaven.

This is what St. Francis of Assisi wanted to say when his father denounced him to the Bishop for giving the money he gave him to buy cloth as alms and he undressed himself in front of everybody saying: I don't want to wear anything of yours because now you are no longer my father; I have only one Father and he will give me everything. And the Bishop had to cover him with his cloak because he was completely naked. From that moment on, St. Francis had nothing that was his father's and nevertheless he was completely happy, feeling himself to be the brother of all men and of all nature, because all were children of his Father.

We say that a real spirituality must appear in our communities, not a spirituality of false mysticisms, but a biblical spirituality: God who talks with you through history. A catechumen is one who is in continual dialogue with God through history. Which history? Yours, concrete: that you hurt your foot, that your wife got angry with you, that your son has been suspended, etc. In this concrete historical reality, God happens and you answer him still within that same history. There is where God is, not in some special place where you have to go and look for him. That's why Christianity is not to escape from reality but exactly the opposite: it is to have a meeting with the risen Jesus Christ in history itself. Everything works together for the good of those who love God (see Rm 8:28). The Christian is attentive to everything that happens because there

God is speaking to him. Everything that happens, either good or bad, is a Word of God.

As in the Book of Job. Job is left without land, without any flocks and without children. Everybody wants to interpret his events, his history. This is what the Christians do: a prophecy on the historical events.

Crisis of faith

There do not only exist a process of desacralization and dechristianization, but also a process of crisis of faith.

We were saying that there is a dechristianization because we have not been adequately catechized, because we have not had a biblical education in the faith, because we have not had a true meeting with Jesus Christ risen, because in us faith is not something personal and alive that gives us eternal life and saves us from death, but we live Christianity at a religious level. That's why there is a divorce in us between religion and life. We try to live as best we can and when things go wrong we go to the temple to ask. When there is thunder, we remember St. Barbara. This is the religious meaning of using God. Even though it is true that Jesus Christ can use even this and help a person who is asking for what he needs.

But there is also a crisis of faith. Why? Because the signs of faith are not seen. This is very important: there can be no Christian unless another Christian is seen. Faith cannot exist unless we meet an adult Christian. Why? Because the Church is the temple of God. Because Christ has wanted to meet men. If we are the Church and the Church is the temple of God, we will understand that men can meet God only through us. If you build a huge temple, they will be able to see God at the level of natural religiosity but not necessarily the God of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has made himself one with men. It is in Christians that you meet Jesus Christ. That's why it's clear that you may have a meeting with God at the level of natural religiosity because you are afraid of being fired or because you are afraid of getting sick and for this reason you go to the temple, but it's very possible that you have never seen a Christian. You go to visit the Blessed Sacrament and you perform religious rituals as a Muslim does. You fulfill your religious obligations towards God, just like a Muslim goes to the mosque. But the day your terror passes, since the rituals performed as an obligation are quite boring and we are all lazy people, you grow cold and go back to your former habits.

In Christianity this is not the problem. In natural religiosity you need a priest with a beautiful cassock to administer the worship for you. And if one day you learn that this priest has gone off with a woman, you are greatly scandalized.

In Christianity, faith is a different thing. It's very different when you meet Jesus Christ through a Christian. It's not only a matter of doing rituals, it's different.

Where is the crisis of faith coming from? From the fact that the signs of faith are not seen. And what are the signs of

faith? We explained this in the previous catechesis: LOVE and UNITY.

Where are these signs given in the present structure of the parish? Where are these brothers and sisters who love one another to the point of giving up their lives? For the good news is that we do not die, that eternal life has reached us, that Christ is risen. A man has overcome death and gives us a share in his victory, in eternal life. The Church gives eternal life and she gives it with sacraments, with signs, rather than with rational demonstrations.

What do you ask of the Church of God? this was asked of us at Baptism and our godfather answered in our name: faith. What does faith give you? Eternal life. In the primitive Church many sacramental signs were done before the catechesis. Many catecheses were given after Baptism during the stage of the neophytes. They understood that the sign was real, it spoke for itself, because a sign that needs a lot of explanation is not a good sign. We, too, received Baptism as babies and are doing the catechesis now.

The Church gives eternal life and one may or may not have it. He who has not overcome death, he who does not walk on the water, does not have eternal life. He who does not let himself be destroyed, he who does not take the sin of the other one on himself, does not have eternal life, we can say. Because the good news is this: you don't die. This is the news all the world is waiting for because we all have to die, white, black, Chinese, Muslim, etc. We are all condemned to death. No one has overcome death. They might have gotten to the moon or wherever you like, but no one has overcome death. All of Christianity is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This fact, that we do not die, is something people don't believe just like that, no problem. The Church has to make this visible, to be a sign of it. That's why the Council spoke of the Church as sacrament of salvation. People need to see this fact that we don't die.

What does a Christian have to do so that people may see Christ? Many prayers, maybe? The Jews and the Muslims also pray a lot, not to mention the Buddhists. And yet they are not a sign of Jesus Christ. Does he have to be honest and hard-working? I know many atheists who are very honest and who have made a religion of honesty and hard work. They are people who always fulfill their duties, hard workers, yet they never go to church. They are not a sign of Jesus Christ. Is it to be very chaste and pure or to fast a lot? Well, look: the Muslims do terrible fasts and they cannot eat meat or drink alcoholic drinks and yet they are not a sign of Jesus Christ, either, not to mention the Buddhists. Is it to be socially just and help the poor? The Marxists also do this and they are not a sign of Jesus Christ. How does the Church make Jesus Christ visible? By giving a consolation in the hereafter, in the sense of natural religiosity? Many religions do this and not even they are the sign of Jesus Christ. In all religions there is the sense of life seen as a trial with a final judgment ending in punishment for the bad and reward for the good. Christianity is more than

this. Christianity says that we are all already judged and that the judgment on all sins has been made on the Cross of Jesus Christ who has forgiven us all. God has already judged the sins of men. Do you know what God's verdict has been in front of that man who stole thousands of dollars from you and left you in the street, or of the one who has done you so much harm? Forgiveness and mercy.

How is the world going to find out about this? How will men come to know that all their sins are forgiven? How will the people realize that if the wage of sin is death (see Rm 6:23), the wage of the forgiveness of sins is the resurrection? Jesus Christ has been handed over for our sins and raised for our justification, says St. Paul (see Rm 4:25). Jesus Christ died in our place. If I am Christ himself and Christ is risen, I am risen. I am forgiven and alive forever. But explain this to me: how do people come to know this in a world as secularized as the one in which we live? How will people discover that we do not die?

Well, Jesus Christ says it: LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. IN THIS LOVE, TO THE POINT OF DEATH, THEY WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES (see Jn 13:34ff). If a person has received Christ, death no longer has power over him and he will let himself be killed. If a man punches me in the nose, hard, because of the anger he has inside, maybe because his father used to beat his mother or whatever reason you want, if this person sins against me, how will I tell him that God forgives him this sin? Well, in the same way as Jesus Christ did; letting himself be killed and saying: Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing (see Lk 23:34). Like St. Stephen did when they were stoning him, who was offering his blood for his executioners to save them. These murderers can be saved through the blood of St. Stephen, because it was the very blood of Jesus Christ (see Ac 7:60).

We Christians drink the blood of Christ. The blood of the Christians is identical to the same redeeming blood of Jesus Christ. This reality has to reach every age. That which happened once and for all on Calvary must be brought about in every generation. This is what the Church has been called to do; this is her mission. If you are the Church, people around you will discover that God forgives them, that they don't die, through you. If you do not forgive, apart from the fact that you are a hypocrite, you are not salt but sand that destroys the soup. Because you are a priest for the world, so that those men who have false ideas of God, who believe in the God of religions, a justice-maker who, as soon as you move, hits you over the head with a stick, in you they will discover the God of Jesus Christ. Everything that has been done with you, you have to do with others, if it's true that God has done something with you, if you have received the gift of God: mercy, eternal life, forgiveness, if it's true that God has begotten Jesus Christ within you.

Love and Unity are the signs that save the world because they make Jesus Christ visible to the world.

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The answer to this situation of the Church has been the Second Vatican Council. In the face of these processes of desacralization, dechristianization and crisis of faith, the Holy Spirit did not remain indifferent but replied with the Council.

And how has the Council answered this situation? To a process of desacralization, because the sense of worship has been lost, because the liturgy was no longer saying anything to us, the first thing the Council has done is to renew the liturgy and to speak of the signs which must be recovered. The Council has begun a profound liturgical renewal.

To a process of dechristianization, because we had not been adequately catechized and we had a very juridical theology, the Second Vatican Council has renewed the theological approach to the dogma of the Redemption, starting from a consideration of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus and backed up by a very serious theological renewal enacted by the Church.

And to a crisis of faith, because the signs of faith are missing, the Council, which declared itself to be ecumenical, saw that unity is something basic and fundamental in order to announce Jesus Christ. Ecumenism comes from the necessity of mission, for the divisions amongst Christians make it very difficult to listen to the message of the Gospel because people get scandalized.

But now comes the most important thing: how to bring what the Council has done to the parish? How to apply the renewal of the Council to the concrete parish?

By means of a neocatechumenal Christian community, by opening a neocatechumenal way.

How does the catechumenate answer the concrete situation of the Church? Because everything we have talked about is happening to us, inside our parishes.

To a crisis of faith that exists today in the parish, because people do not see adult Christians who give signs of faith, how will we reply? We will form a Christian community that will give the signs of faith.

In front of dechristianization, because we have an infantile faith, a faith that is not truly adult, because it's a faith of First Communion, we will open a catechumenate in the parish. We will enter into the Church in a mature way. What is the door to enter into the Church? Baptism. There is no other path. Today people speak a lot about the plurality of ways, but to enter into the Church there is only one: Baptism. So we will rediscover our Baptism, through a serious catechumenate that takes years.

In the face of a process of desacralization we will rediscover, together with our Christianity, a living liturgy, full of content.

This meeting with Jesus Christ will be to relive, by steps, the sacramental reality of our Baptism: our new birth and our entry into the Church of Jesus Christ.

FOURTH DAYTHE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The Church in the plan of God (751-780); the Church, people of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit (781-810); the Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic (811-870); the faithful, the hierarchy, the consecrated life (871-945); the Communion of Saints (946-962); Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church (963-975).

(Kiko)

This catechesis begins with a quick summary of the previous one. It looks briefly at the outline of the situation of the Church and the answer of the Second Vatican Council and the practical application of the Council in the parish.

In the previous catechesis, with a few brushstrokes, we gave an analysis of the situation of the Church. We summed up this analysis in three words: desacralization, dechristianization and crisis of faith.

SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS CATECHESISDesacralization

By desacralization we mean the process of a loss of the mystery of God within the Church. Why is this being lost? Because, we said, people have worshipped the idols of the neighboring peoples (see Deut 6:14ff). Just as the people of Israel experienced death when they worshipped the gods of the neighboring peoples, so we (with the missionary impulse of trying to bring the Christian message to the secularized, pragmatic man of today who does not believe in anything and to the socialist man) relied on his idols. We thought that by doing this we would get near him, that he would understand and listen to us. We thought that if we spoke to him in terms different from his own, he would have laughed at us. So, for the man who believes in science, we have become scientists and have put our trust in psychology and sociology. By the time we realized what was happening, we had paid a very high price and we too went into crisis and became desacralized. Perhaps the word desacralization is not a happy choice, but ordinary people understand it fairly well. The same thing has happened with the socialist man: we relied on his techniques and we made of Christianity a militant ideal of political and revolutionary action. And then we realized that priests had become Marxists, people had become secularized and left the Church. To these people prayer and the liturgy no longer meant anything, because to them prayer is a waste of time.

With this first term we tried to describe one aspect of the crisis that the Church is experiencing today.

Dechristianization

We also perceive a process of dechristianization within the Church. Christ is no longer of any interest and it seems almost as though Christ has failed. In many Christians who go to Mass we see a divorce between religion and life. We explained this as being basically due to a lack of initiation to a real and authentic faith. For the most part, we Christians have an infantile faith of natural religiosity. We have never listened to the word of Abraham: Leave your country and your kinsfolk and start walking. We have never left anything and go on trying to use God.

We said that the difference between religion and faith is that religion makes use of God when things go wrong, for instance, when a daughter becomes ill, or someone is out of a job. Instead, the Christian serves God. In Christianity it is God who makes the first move. We saw, too, that the entire history of salvation, as presented in the Bible, is fundamentally a process in which God tries to free man from the religiosity that is idolatry, that is, from the situation where man tries to put the gods, or God himself, at his service, using God for his own benefit.

In fact, the history of salvation begins with Abraham. God commands Abraham to follow him without even telling him the whereabouts of the land he will give him. He is a God who forbids any representation of himself or any idolatrous worship because he does not allow anyone to make use of him. He is a God who never shows himself visibly. (Religious historians find it difficult to explain the monotheism of Israel, when all the peoples around them were polytheistic. This does not have a sociological explanation. It is really a miracle that this people preserved its monotheism without losing it under the influence of the neighboring peoples. This cannot be explained without God's direct intervention with and very close watch over his people.)

So to explain a little of what we mean by infantile faith, we spoke of natural religiosity. We pointed out that basically in the naturally religious man there is a divorce between religion and life because he locates the sacred in the temple and only there. God is in the temple and there is where you must go to ask for things. Outside, in the world, is the profane reality. To enter the temple you must purify yourself. When things go well, this man lives his life without God. This is true of all religions. People drink, feast, trade, play, live, but when they find themselves facing disaster, back they all go to God because they don't know how to deal with this event. Instead, in Christianity, because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, there is no longer the sacred and profane: everything has become holy.

We said, too, that these Christians who live their lives at this level of natural religiosity live a religion of fear. In some way or another they live in fear of punishment from God. This way of living Christianity comes from not having been sufficiently catechized and educated in faith. Perhaps we have never seen true Christianity made flesh in real men. For

Christianity is not an ideal for saints, but it is a life for all men that gives them happiness.

The other day I said that the world is living a process of secularization. The positive aspect of this phenomenon is that people no longer turn to religion in an infantile way and this will help Christianity to divest itself of the trappings of natural religiosity and announce the Gospel with clarity. For Christianity is not a religion in the sense of the natural religions, but it is fundamentally good news.

The phenomenon in which people no longer look for the solution to some of their problems in natural religiosity but rather in psychiatry, the doctor and science in general, today is called secularization. The process of secularization is very important: inside him, the naturally religious man has a scheme, that of natural religiosity, which stops him from listening. According to this scheme, life is a test and God is a judge who will judge you at the end of time according to your deeds and you will go to heaven or hell depending on whether you deserve reward or punishment.

This scheme is incomplete and inadequate. For according to it, everything depends on man, depends on whether his deeds conform to or go against the law. The person who observes the law goes to heaven; the person who doesn't goes to hell. This is why the naturally religious man, following this scheme, goes to the temple to "fulfill" his duty to God. He goes to Church and he thinks he already knows what the priest is going to say and so he doesn't listen. What will the priest say? To be good, to try hard, to make sacrifices, to work, to be honest, not to steal, not to kill... And since we are all very weak and sinful and we fall, all the religions have rites of purification for when man transgresses the law. As far as he is concerned, the catecheses are an appeal to his conscience, calling him to be honest with respect to the natural law within him.

Secularized man, however, already has no illusions. And since Christianity is not based on the law but on good news, which announces that we are all sinners before the law but that in Jesus Christ we have been judged and all our sins have been forgiven and that now there is a second judgment, which is to accept or not accept this free pardon and that he who accepts it will receive the Holy Spirit, the life of God himself, the secularized man accepts this more simply.

Crisis of Faith

We have seen that underlying this whole reality is a serious crisis of faith. This crisis is fundamental. It consists of this: we do not see the signs of faith. Theologians say that without the signs of faith there cannot be faith. Indeed, without the signs of faith you cannot even speak of Jesus Christ because no one listens.

Therefore, we explained, it is very important to create a community in the parish that may give these signs of faith. We know these signs are the ones that open people's ears; they are the ones that create the necessary question marks that enable

men to listen to the good news. These signs are: LOVE IN THE DIMENSION OF THE CROSS AND UNITY.

In a word, these signs are the signs of Jesus Christ who overcame death and who has also overcome death in us. He lives in us and makes us participants in his victory over death. This becomes visible when I can love my brother in the dimension of the Cross. Only the man who has overcome death can love in this way, can love his enemy.

So we ask ourselves: where are those Christians who give their lives for their enemies, who do not resist evil, who are the Servant of Yahweh in history today, who are the living Christ who in this generation continues to take on himself the sins of men, who continue to announce (not merely by talking about it) the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, taking on the sins of others and destroying them in their own bodies and killing these sins with their own deaths, as Christ did and who show that the love of God is greater than these sins and this death?

Since we believe that these are the signs of faith, we see that the most important thing is to arrive at the measure of faith that will enable us to give these signs to the world. But how can we acquire this? How has the Church always given faith? Through a catechumenate. This is why we always speak of the neocatechumenate.

Answer of the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council has answered very seriously to this situation in the Church, to this serious reality in which many people have lost the sense of God, where for many of us there is a divorce between religion and life (to the great scandal of the atheists), in which we find ourselves in a profound crisis of faith because we don't see the signs of faith.

To the process of desacralization the Council has answered by renewing the liturgy, because we have lost the sense of God, of *worship* and of the liturgy. It began a renewal that frightened many people who thought: they are changing our religion, they are changing the Mass. The fact that people were scandalized is one of the things that proves people have a natural religiosity because for the religious man everything that comes from heaven is immutable. In religion, immutability is a proof that something is true because it holds good for everyone and for always. What he does not realize is that everything that God does, he does for man and does it in a concrete history, a history that is always in a process of development. So the God of Scripture is never immobile. He is always "He who passes," in total contrast with the static gods of the other religions. Our God is the "Merkaba" (see Ezek 1), the chariot of fire, the one who "passes." He is the Passover, the one who passes over and makes us pass too. The risen Jesus Christ is never static. The apostles meet him under different aspects and always moving.

The liturgy changes form with the changing of the language and the culture of peoples. When, in the first centuries of the Church, they began to celebrate Mass in Latin everyone could

have been scandalized, thinking that Greek was the sacred language (in which the New Testament had been written). This kind of scandal is the proof that people live their Christianity at a very naturally religious level.

The Council has renewed the liturgy with great courage. Such deep renewal undertaken by the Council cannot be understood without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. This Council marks a stage in the history of the Church. We left behind a certain immobility (which was necessary in its time) and we entered a fertile period of renewal and creation that we live in today. The liturgy is in constant renewal. When there is not this renewal, perhaps the Holy Spirit is not in us.

As an answer to a process of dechristianization, which was due to the fact that we were not adequately catechized, that we had a very juridical theology, in which, without being aware of it, we had impoverished the vision of God (as when saying that the bit of sea visible between the hills is the sea, when the sea cannot be encapsulated and is immense in every sense), the Council renewed theology, spoke of the Paschal Mystery, of a catechumenate for adults and of a pastoral of evangelization.

This theological renewal also scandalized many people who were accustomed to an explanation of dogma in a more juridical form, external to man, rather than in an existential, living way. This is why with the renewal many people have been left behind.

Faced with a crisis of faith, the Council felt the importance of the unity of Christians and spoke of the Church as sacrament of salvation, as a sign that calls men to faith and of rediscovering the local community as the place in which the signs of love and unity are made visible for the world. The Council really is a marvelous springtime for the Church. God used a Pope who was considered by everyone to be transitional to begin an unexpected renewal of the Church.

Concrete Application of the Council

What is the problem for us? How can we bring this renewal of the Council to the parish in a concrete way? For this situation of crisis in the Church is fundamentally at the parish level: we are desacralized; our catechesis is infantile; we don't see the signs of faith.

Our response to this situation is:

To the crisis of faith we shall reply by beginning a Christian neocatechumenal community that begins to walk until the Love of God and the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ becomes visible; where, by means of Love in the dimension of the cross and Unity, it can be seen that man has been transformed by the life-giving Spirit of Jesus Christ, that he has been deified, that he has overcome death. This is why the Church is spoken of today as the Sacrament of Salvation for the world. As a response to the crisis of faith, we want to make visible within the parish the signs of faith that will call men to faith.

In front of a process of dechristianization that exists in our parishes because people do not have an adult faith, since

they have not been initiated to faith, we will begin a catechumenate in the parish. The catechumenate is the way the Church has had to initiate people to faith, where people can discover the deep Christian mystery of life. We will do this neocatechumenate in small communities which help us to see our deep reality of sin and in which we can relive our Baptism in steps. The road by which we shall walk towards the Kingdom of God is Baptism. For, apart from Baptism, there is no other door through which the Church can be entered. We shall relive our Baptism in steps in a catechumenal way, like the catechumenate of the primitive Church did before Baptism.

In the primitive Church, Baptism of adults was not given in one day, but it was a whole way of catecheses, mystagogies, initiations to prayer, signs, impositions of hands, anointings, scrutinies, exorcisms, etc. To reach the last step of Baptism, one had to pass through a long way during which JESUS CHRIST WAS GESTATED IN THE CATECHUMEN. For inside him there is a baby who is kicking, who wants to be born and show himself. But if there's nothing inside, it's a hysterical pregnancy, so to say. Only those in whom the apostle and his collaborators (*didascaloi* and catechists) recognized the work of God, those who had Jesus Christ in them and made him visible with signs of adult faith, could go through the last step of Baptism. This Jesus Christ is born in Baptism. This is why the Church has always seen the baptismal font as the womb of the Church, where the new man is born. This is why Mary is the figure of the Church, because in her womb she gestated Jesus Christ and gave birth to him. And, just as the child inside the mother is in a sack of water, so the new man, Jesus Christ, is born from the water of Baptism.

To the process of desacralization we shall reply, in the measure in which faith grows in us, by rediscovering a living liturgy, full of content, a liturgy that is a profound, existential meeting with the risen Jesus Christ.

This is the summary of the previous catechesis. It is a good idea to give this briefly before the catechesis that, strictly speaking, is on the mission of the Church.

Summary diagram

Current situation of the Church	Answer of Second Vatican Council	Application in the parish
Desacralization	Liturgical Renewal	Living Liturgy
Dechristianization	Theological Renewal	Neocatechumenate
Crisis of faith	Ecumenism	Community - Sign

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

This is the last of the catecheses in the preamble.

Where is this neocatechumenal community going? This catechesis will answer that question. The community has the mission of making visible in the parish the signs of faith that call other brothers and sisters to the Church.

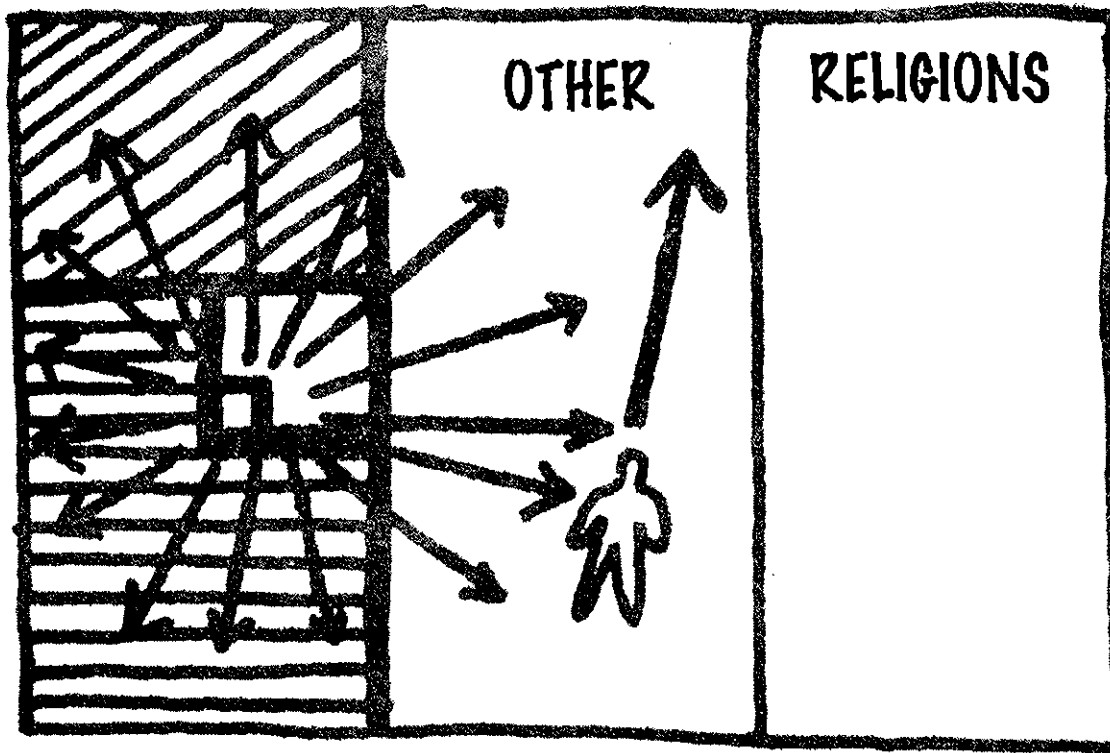
The community has the mission of opening a catechumenal way in the parish. When other brothers and sisters want to enter, they will enter another community because the community cannot be too big. In this manner we will go on opening communities and will help to form a new parish structure, a "community of communities", as in the Church's pastoral proposals. The different charisms will appear in the community, which will be presided over by a presbyter. In the primitive Church there was the "congregation of widows" who dedicated themselves to visiting the sick but where each widow belonged to her own Christian community. They did not form a separate community but lived in the Church. The importance of the local Church was very strongly emphasized by the Council: the Church is not the sum of all the local Churches, but in every local Church the universal Church is present and functions. This is important because it means that the local community is not a little piece of the Church but that in the local Church, in communion with all the others, Jesus Christ is present in fullness. This communion is expressed by the College of Bishops presided over by the Bishop of Rome.

Before we go on, we must clarify some ideas because people listen to us from their point of view and with their scheme of things and since the same word does not mean the same thing for the person talking and the one listening, we have to come to an agreement on some concepts.

What is the mission of the Church? To understand the mission of the community, the mission of the parish, we must understand the mission of the Church.¹ Let's see.

¹ CCC 851: It is from God's love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigor of her missionary dynamism, "for the love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14). Indeed, God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4); that is, God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth. Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary.

I'll do a sketch that nearly all of you know. It's a sketch that helps make things clear.



Statistics say that if this rectangle represents the three billion people who populate the planet, only approximately one-third of the rectangle represents the Christians. Let's see who are the Christians with adult faith, the living Church of Jesus Christ and the sacrament that announces to men the salvation that the Father has given us in Jesus Christ. (Keep in mind that I haven't made up the statistics but they are what Fr. Farnés gave us in a talk on pastoral.)

I mean that there is something serious that we want to think about together. If there are about 3 billion people in the world, only a third (1 billion) are Christians.

Of these, only slightly more than half are Catholics. This includes Spain, Portugal, Italy, South America, etc. The rest are Protestants, Orthodox, etc. Of the Catholics, the statistics tell us, only 10% go to Mass on Sunday, to fulfill the obligation. All the other Catholics are those who have made their First Communion but who have left the Church, people who, out of lack of interest, or laziness, or whatever, do not go to Mass on Sunday. You can't say that people who don't even come to Mass on Sunday have an adult Christian faith, can you? They have a rudiment of religion and may go to Church for a wedding or a funeral, but not otherwise.

Of those who go to Mass on Sunday, say the statistics, only 1.5% are adult Christians. That is, they are serious and conscious Christians. They don't go to Mass just because the wife tells them: "Listen, Joe, we haven't been to Mass for three weeks. What will the children say?" The others are those who go to Mass and sit at the back of the church waiting for the half hour to end so they can go away.

This little group, represented in the graph by a small dot, is the living Church, with adult faith, the Church sign of Jesus Christ for the world.

In front of these statistics the first thought that occurs is that Jesus Christ, after 2000 years, has failed.

I would ask: Who does God love more, a person inside this little dot of adult Christians, or someone outside?

Ask the people this. The answer is that God does not have favorites (see Acts 10:34). God loves everyone infinitely and in the same way.

(Carmen)

You must allow the people time to assimilate the fact that the living Church is such a small group, something that the diagram shows very clearly. Perhaps people have never thought about this and suddenly they are surprised to see there are so few Christians with adult faith in the world.

(Kiko)

Many people may think that God loves the ones inside the dot more.

Perhaps we think the Church fulfills her mission when all the people not in the Church are converted, that is, when she brings them into the little dot. If this were true, then certainly we can say Christ has failed after 2000 years because today those who really are in the Church are very few. If this is the mission of the Church, to bring everybody into the Church, how is it that God has permitted that those within the Church today are so few?

Another idea people have: if we are not in this little square, we are condemned. If this is true, the first thing we think when we look at this diagram is that an awful lot of people are condemned.

With this catechesis we want to dismantle a little these ideas that many people have about the mission of the Church.

Let us see in the Gospel how Jesus Christ has envisaged his Church. Did he consider her as the only raft of salvation in the sense that only baptized Catholics with adult faith can be saved?

In the Gospel Jesus says: YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH (see Mt 5:13-16). YOU ARE THE LEAVEN (see Mt 13:33).

If Jesus conceives of his Church in this way, everything changes. For if Jesus conceives of his Church as a light and

this little dot is a strong spotlight, this can enlighten the darkness perfectly and fulfill its mission. Thus the Church will be a light, an illumination for all men.

Let's take a close look at what these three elements mean: light, salt and leaven.²

Light

I'll give you an example. If we are in a dark room and have to find the exit because we all risk dying of asphyxiation because our lives are in danger, we need a light to find the exit, a strong light that will illuminate the way out. If someone finds that light, the window up there will be illuminated and if we move the piano and put a table on top of the piano, one by one, we can climb out of the window and all be saved.

According to the idea of the Church that we had, the important thing was to light lots of little candles. But if we light little candles the exit is not lit. The solution is to find one powerful light to light up the way out and so find salvation.

(Carmen)

As light is a sign and symbol that has been used fairly badly in songs and books, which present it as something marvelous and bright in a triumphalistic way, there is a risk of interpreting it as a privilege, as if to be a Christian is for select and perfect people, for the best. It's not like this at all: LIGHT IS A SERVICE. Which is more important, the light or us? US, without a doubt. To be light is not to be something bright and shining, privileged, nor are we Christians the "only ones," shining like fireflies.

(Kiko)

What's important is not so much to be light but to do the service of enlightening men so that everyone is enlightened, everyone discovers the light. Maybe we want to be this light, this strong light, because it seems that in this way we are more

² CCC 782: The mission (of the People of God)... is to be salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). This people is "a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race (LG).

CCC 854: By her very mission, "the Church... travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world: she is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (GS 40). Missionary endeavor requires patience. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ, continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are "signs of God's presence in the world" (AG 15) and leads to the foundation of local churches (see RMiss 48-49)...

perfect. God has not conceived things in this way. He conceived light as a service. Let's see with another example what light does. If there were no light in this room what would happen? If someone were to call me over while we were in the dark, the first thing I would do is break a leg as I fell over this chair in front of me; then I'd bang my head against this pillar; and finally I'd risk killing myself falling from up here and so on. Light puts me in my reality. It is a service for me. It shows me that here there's a chair, there is a pillar, etc. It deeply enlightens my reality. If I don't know my reality, I can kill myself, I can die. This is why the service that the light does for me is very important.

Salt

The parallel here is even clearer. Salt is one thing and potatoes, meat, beans, etc., are other things. Salt is something completely different from everything else. It's impossible to eat soup if it's all salt. Imagine that here is a big pot to make a stew: we put in potatoes, beans, meat, rice, whatever you like and we cook all of these. When we taste it, it has no flavor. But we add a few pinches of salt, something entirely different from everything else in the pot and mix it all together. Now if we taste it once more, everything has its own flavor again. However, if I find a lump of salt, I spit it out because the purpose of the salt is to disappear, to dissolve, to die within the stew.

This is what happens in the world. The world has lost its meaning because of sin. It has moved away from God and is in darkness and without taste. It has lost the deep sense of its reality. So God himself takes the salt. It is he who chooses the Church and sends her to the world so the world may recover its meaning.

Nor do we understand this concept of election very well. It is Christ who appears to St. Paul and throws him off his horse. God gives special graces to a Christian and does not give them to others in order to make Christians salt. But this does not mean that we are better than other people. God makes no exceptions. Each person will be judged according to the measure he has received. Much will be asked of the one to whom much has been given. Someone who has done evil without knowing it will be punished less than one who knew what he was doing. The Lord says this in the Gospel (Lk 12:47-48).

Jesus Christ said: YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH. The mission of salt is not to remain whole but to salt the world. How does it salt the world? By dying.

Leaven

The same thing again. We have a big pile of flour and we put a bit of leaven in it and at the end you can't tell the leaven from the rest because it has dissolved in the dough and has fermented everything. If this rectangle were a heap of flour and this tiny square a bit of leaven, this little bit would ferment the entire pile.

This is why historians say that the Church has fermented history much more than appears to be the case. Basically, what is happening today is thanks to a Christianity which existed and which has fermented.

The Gospel goes on saying: why is the Church light, salt and leaven? BECAUSE MEN, SEEING YOUR GOOD WORKS, WILL GIVE GLORY TO YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.³

From this we can deduce that the primary mission of the Church is not to make everyone enter and become juridically part of her, but it is that she may enlighten men and reach the Father.

At the meeting we had in Rome with all the pastors and responsables and at which was present Cardinal Poletti, Cardinal Vicar of Rome, a pastor from the suburbs stood up. He was a worker-priest, one of those who are quickly joining this way in Italy. He said: Here we have a clash between two theologies, two different concepts of the Church. Either the Church is the only raft of salvation, in the sense that those who are not in it juridically are condemned; or the Church is the sacrament of salvation for the world. And he went on: If men are saved only by belonging to this Church through the sacraments, then we have to continue and above all we must ensure that the priest is in the hospitals to give "extreme unction" to everyone who is dying. Above all, we must baptize every baby as soon as it is born. We must go into the homes, to the families and do everything possible to get people to come to Mass. However, if the mission of the Church is not fundamentally that, but is to be the sacrament of salvation, then many of our parishes today are in a practical heresy because they are not the sacrament of salvation. If the Church is a sacrament of salvation, we must create within the parishes a sign for the atheists, the Marxists, the secularized men of whom our cities are full.

That is what he said and what he said is very serious. If, as we say, what enslaves man is sin and, because of the experience of sin that he has had, the fear of death, IF MEN SEE THE GOOD NEWS THAT SIN AND DEATH HAVE BEEN CONQUERED REALIZED, I am sure that this will save them, will make them rejoice and will enlighten them.

Now we have to explain a little what this enlightenment consists of.

(Carmen)

You must insist on this because the people listening to you have another mentality. This concept of the Church is one of the

³ CCC 2044: The fidelity of the baptized is a primordial condition for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church's mission in the world. In order that the message of salvation can show the power of its truth and radiance before men, it must be authenticated by the witness of the life of Christians. "The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God" (AA 6).

great rediscoveries of the Council. The Council's Constitution on the Church is called "LIGHT OF THE NATIONS" (*Lumen Gentium*), referring to Christ whose light shines on the face of the Church. This is very significant.

The primitive Church never saw herself as the only raft of salvation, in a juridical sense, but as having a mission within history. The affirmation of St. Cyprian: "Outside the Church there is no salvation,"⁴ apart from its true dogmatic content, had also, in a certain period, a concrete historical sense. You would have needed to have very bad will not to have entered the Church because practically all the known world had listened to the Good News and had come into contact with living Christianity. Now it is true that, outside Jesus Christ and his grace, fully present in the Church and his sacraments, there is no salvation, because the salvation that God has won for men is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is present in his Church; but this should not be understood in a juridically restricted way, in the sense that only Catholics can be saved. With regard to this you can read *Lumen Gentium* (nn. 13-16).

Nevertheless, this phrase, understood in a juridically restricted way, is the mentality of many people listening to you. It is also certainly the basis of our ideas of the Church. From it comes the fact that people think the fundamental mission of the Church is to give Confession and "extreme unction" to all the dying and Baptism to all new-born children, etc. In fact, if the Church were the only raft of salvation in this juridically restricted sense, in the sense that only Catholics are saved, then this would be the fundamental thing to do.

⁴ CCC 846: How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body: "Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it (LG 14).

CCC 847: This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience, those too may achieve eternal salvation (LG 16).

Lumen Gentium, by proclaiming the Church to be the sacrament of salvation,⁵ has meant a radical renewal of this mentality. The concept that we had before was of belonging to the Church juridically in order to be saved in the next life. It is very difficult to get rid of this mentality. Because of this mentality, the priority was to baptize at all costs, even at sword point, if necessary; otherwise many people would be condemned. And the fundamental mission of the Church is to get everyone to belong to her, even if only in name, through Baptism understood in a very juridical way.

(Kiko)

If for us the Church is, as conceived by the Council, sacrament of salvation, it is not primarily a question of having many people in the Church, but rather that in the parish there be a community of real Christians who are sacrament of salvation for the people who don't come to church. The problem for us is that, wherever there is a group of people, there should be in their midst a Church which is leaven, a Church that, without imposing herself, calls men to salvation and conversion, a Church that is close to them, sharing their existential reality and, without imposing herself, announces to these men the salvation of Jesus Christ.⁶

(Carmen)

The other concept leads to a proselytism that tries to baptize everyone at all costs. There have been times when this was forced, sword in hand. Instead, this concept is the opposite. It is a call to authenticity. If the Church is not light, it is because this small square is obscured, covered by

⁵ CCC 812: As the First Vatican Council noted, the "Church herself,... is a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefutable witness of her divine mission."

CCC 849: *The missionary mandate*. "Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation', the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men" (AG 1): "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, until the close of the age" (Mt 28:19-20).

⁶ CCC 905: Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, "that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life." For lay people, "this evangelization... acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world" (LG 35).

"This witness of life, however, is not the sole element in the apostolate; the true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers... or to the faithful" (AA 6; see AG 15).

the veil of darkness of all these half-baked Christians who prevent people from seeing living Christianity. To be the Church is not a privilege (this is a moralistic concept) but is a free gift of God at the service of man. This way of understanding election was well understood by Israel. Israel knew perfectly well that they were a people chosen for the sake of the nations. They knew that the election had not fallen on them because they were the best of peoples but on the contrary, because they were the worst (see Deut 7:7-8).

It is the same for the Church as for the people of Israel. Israel was holy, not because Israel was very good, but because God had come down to reveal himself to her, so that she would be a light for the nations. This is very strong in Israel, so much so that, even in exile and in the midst of all their sins, they make God manifest, they manifest the fact that God is above all their sins. This can be seen throughout Scripture.

For example, Jacob is chosen without having any right to be chosen. Esau had the right because he was the first-born. Jacob fights with God and leaves the fight limping. In this fight he discovers his own deep inferiority and the superiority of God who is stronger than he is. So he grabs hold of him and doesn't let him go until he has been given his blessing. God gives him the name "Israel," which means "strong with God." Jacob has discovered God's strength and his own weakness. Now, with God, he will be the strongest of all the peoples (see Gen 32:23-33).

(Kiko)

It is precisely for this reason that Israel is called Israel, strong with God. The people of Israel lean on God and defeat all their enemies.

(Carmen)

You must tell the people tonight that the words you are saying to them are a call from God to form a people that is the Church, an event today for the nations, not so much for their own personal perfection. For the Church is not a select grouping of the goodies of the world, of select and perfect people.

(Kiko)

The problem is that people think that if they are not salt they are damned or some such thing. So you can imagine their terror. You must insist, explaining that the Church is a service to the nations. One day the nations will give thanks to God for sending them the Church to enlighten them.

Imagine that there's no light in this room and no one knows the way out. Imagine that God tells someone where the exit is. He doesn't tell him just for himself but so he can tell the others. This enlightenment is not only for the one who receives it but also for the others. It is a service for everyone. For example, when I see that Jesús (a Spanish itinerant) or someone else is inspired, I give thanks to God, for I see that this inspiration is for me because I benefit from it. That's why

Israel always says that when there is no vision or prophecy; it means that they have abandoned God. When this happens, it means that God does not want to manifest himself to his people. So they do penance because God is angry with his people.

The Church is a service. Imagine that there are two people in the woods at night. There's a big storm. Both are getting drenched but one knows the way and the other doesn't. The man who knows the way knows it not only for himself; he knows it also for his companion. Jesus becomes history in us. This is important because with his resurrection Jesus did not come out of history but continues in history, alive in the Church. He continues to lead the nations to God, step by step, without forcing history and permitting that for many generations this Jesus may be destroyed and may not be listened to by history or by the men of some generations.

At the end you must explain what it means to enlighten. How does the Church enlighten, salt and leaven the world?

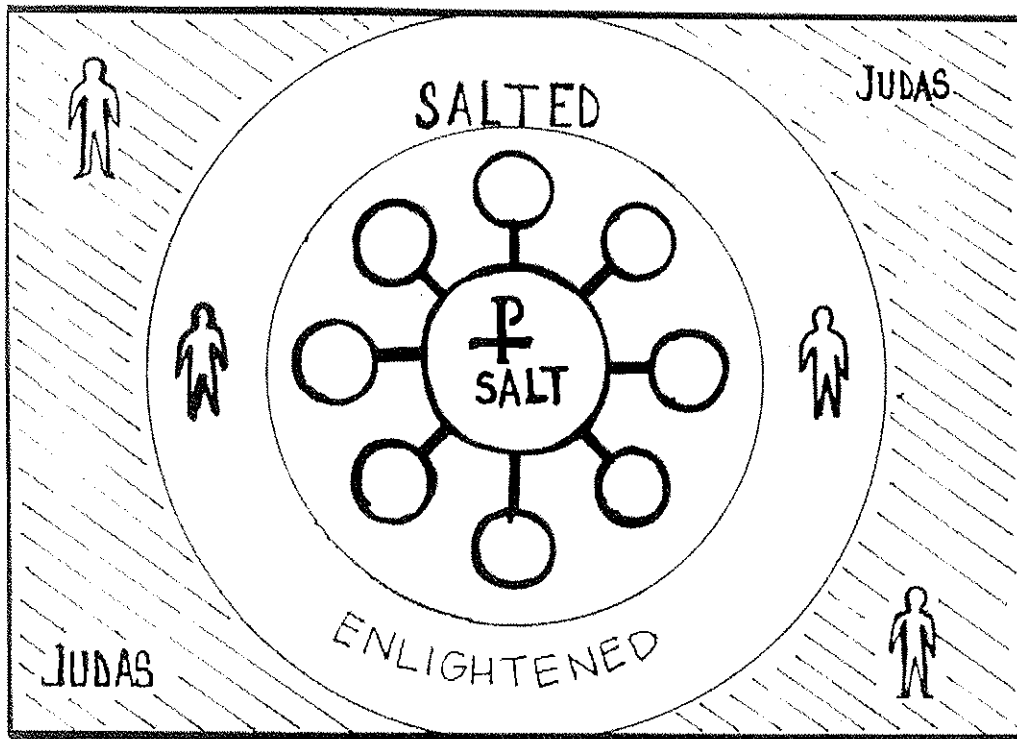
Let us see with a sketch.

In the middle we have the living Church made up of adult Christian communities.

A first circle of people are those who are called to form new communities, called to be the Church-sacrament. It is not that they wanted to be the Church but that they have been elected by God to accomplish this mission, this service.

There's a second circle formed by people whom God calls to the Church but perhaps only to be related to her without ever coming to belong to her juridically (see LG 13). They are called to know the good news, to be salted and enlightened by the Church on their journey.

How? Perhaps they are people who, deep down, feel their weakness. They have their own idea of the truth of things. They believe in the law but see they cannot accomplish it. They see that at work everyone looks after himself and no one gives you a hand. They are people who have received a catechesis from the world: "Cousins, yes, but not brothers;" "Play the redeemer and you end up crucified;" "Through charity you catch the plague;" "Charity begins at home." What this means is: me first, then everyone else. We've had enough! Do you want me to let myself be robbed? Come on!



Scripture says: the word of God is not far from your mouth or your heart (see Rm 10:8; Deut 30:14). For someone to listen to the good news and totally reject it he has to be very depraved. For love is written in our hearts. Today the only thing that young people want to hear about is love.

But for this group of people, this love, this Jesus, is something Utopian. What does it have to do with being able to put up with my mother-in-law at home or my boss at work, who's a brute, interested only in production? All this is very nice for when one is old or sick, at the point of death.

That's what life is like. The catechesis of the world that the people receive is very strong because they receive it not through ideas but through signs and facts. It is a catechesis that comes from the fact of people's selfishness, from criticism, etc. Your husband never gives you lectures or dissertations on love. He simply abandons you and does his own thing and with this he acts. People think that everything else is stupidity and theory.

But Jesus Christ wants the Church to give a catechesis against that of the world: to enlighten the world by making present that this is the truth, that love exists, that it is possible to love in a new dimension because death has been overcome. This is the good news that the Church also gives with facts. What is it that makes us suffer? What stops us from letting ourselves be killed by the wife, the mother-in-law, the husband, the coworker and the children? What makes us put our security in money? The catechesis we did the other day answers

this. A certain man asked Jesus to tell his brother to share his inheritance and Jesus tells him: Be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life is not ensured by the abundance of goods. This catechesis of the primitive Church tells us that man makes money because he is searching for life and he wants to make it secure. And why does he want to secure his life? Because he is afraid of death. What does Jesus Christ announce? What does the Church announce? That death has been overcome. This is announced by a community of brothers and sisters who love one another in the dimension of the cross, letting themselves be killed by the enemy, being a sign with their lives that death has been overcome.

Jesus wants this community to enlighten people little by little. In the beginning people will think they are mad because they let themselves be robbed. For example, when I left my career as a painter and went to live in a shack, my family thought I had gone mad. My cousins came to the community of Arguelles to see if this was the case. But this made my family question things.

In the beginning they will think you are mad, but since you are in the truth because Christ is the truth, what will happen? All the concepts which people have will be tested by fire, as Jesus says (see Mk 9:49). So when one of these people has a really big problem, where will he turn? Christ wants his Church to be there waiting. And if a community has to be waiting in a place for ten years, waiting for the moment in which men will look to the Church and be salted, this is what happens. This is how we think of the Church, without triumphalism or proselytism; without wanting to bring Jesus Christ I-don't-know-where or wanting to get everyone to join her.

Jesus Christ says everyone will be instructed by God (Jn 6:45; Is 54:13). The Father is teaching all men through each person's own history: through the child who runs away from home; through the wife who goes off with another man; through the discovery that you are a failure because, at 47 years old, you become aware that you have never loved anyone or cared about anyone because you are completely selfish. When someone begins to think about all this, where does he turn? To natural religiosity, as everyone does, because they have no other point of reference. They will go to the temple to ask forgiveness from God and go to Communion for a couple of months, but when things begin to go better again and they look on life more optimistically, they will go back to being what they were before. This is my history and your history.

But Jesus Christ came to supersede natural religiosity. God is not a judge whom you must placate or to whom you go only to ask for help. What Jesus Christ gives is much more than that. Jesus Christ calls sinners and takes them out of their anguish, their laziness and gives them all his Spirit.

How does the Church salt? To give taste, the salt must die. What is the news that the Church brings? THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS RISEN FROM DEATH, THAT WE DO NOT DIE. We have been inserted within the living Body of the risen Jesus Christ. Death will not be able to separate us from the love of God (see Rom 8:38-39).

As St. Paul says, we have been called to immortality by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see 2 Tm 1:9-11). This is the answer that all men are waiting for. God did not create man to die but the only reality that men can touch is death. The rest are philosophies, theories; but death is a reality, it is a certainty. Essentially, the Church presents neither a philosophy, nor a religion, nor a perfect theological treatise, nor a "cathedral of thought." The Church is an event; it is a history; it is a fact. IT IS THE FACT THAT A MAN CAN PASS THROUGH DEATH, the fact that you can love your enemy, not as a pretense or for convenience, but because you really feel love for him.

This is how these brothers and sisters of the second circle need to be salted.

(Carmen)

With regard to this, I remember a Little Sister of de Foucauld in a shantytown in Portugal. She spent every day there without saying a word. It was then I understood how people who are not called to belong juridically to the Church are salted. This Little Sister did not demand that the people go to Mass on Sunday but, just by being there, she made God present in history.

The problem for the world is whether God exists or not. Well, this Little Sister, just with her passing by, is making God present and is giving people peace. All these people have the problem of whether or not God exists. The mere fact of this young woman passing through there testifies to God's existence. It is not so much that the people go to Mass, or hope for salvation tomorrow, but above all that those people receive peace and salvation in the midst of their problems.

Salvation is not only something for tomorrow. It's like believing in love when you see an engaged couple. It's the same thing. Just by their presence, people who believe in God make God present. For it's not only, as Kiko says, when he gets cancer, or his son gets ill that a person will remember... There's no need to think only when these things happen. Just the presence of a Christian makes God present among men.

(Kiko)

Without a doubt, that person is putting people in their proper dimension. If there is a Protestant community in a neighborhood or a village, this community is a fact that in some way influences people. So does a Catholic community, but even more so. People have to take a stand in front of it. They'll say they are idiots, or that they spend their time licking the priest's boots, always trying to flatter him so he will find them a house; they'll say they are poorly educated, cowards in the face of life, who take refuge in the Church. They can say whatever you like but somehow or other they have to take a stand.

The fact that a parish has a pastor, two assistants, a big church with five bells, thirty-five statues of saints, a Mass at

8 O'Clock, another at 9, another at 10 and many other things, all these on their own aren't enough to make the Church. They are all elements to build up the community. But the Church with adult faith may be there or may not be. The fact that there is a priest who rings the bells for Mass and the people come does not yet constitute the adult Church of Jesus Christ. These are all elements for the people to gather so that the Church may be created. But the adult Church may or may not be there. It is the same as giving a catechesis and forming a community. This does not mean that the adult Church exists. If those in the community do not give the signs of faith, there is no adult Church. They can know everything very well theoretically and say I believe or I don't believe, but that's all there is. This is merely to adhere to truths. We're not Protestants: faith without works is dead (see Jm 2:14-26). Tell me your works and I'll tell you what faith you have. The catechumenate is another element to build the Church, but the Church may be given or may not be given. For the Church cannot be manufactured. It is either there, or it is not. Where, then, is the Church? Where there is the Holy Spirit, where there is the life-giving Spirit of Jesus Christ risen, where there is the new man of the Sermon on the Mount. Where this exists, there is the Church.

So we've seen a first big circle of people called to belong fully to the Church-sacrament. Then there is another big circle of people who perhaps will never enter the Church juridically but who are called by God to be salted, fermented, enlightened by the Church. These are people who will begin to think after a while: They're not as crazy as I thought they were. How stupid and unjust I have been to criticize them so much. Yesterday my son died and my cousin who is in the community stayed with me through the night to keep watch and no one else in my family came. And when I've asked them for something, they've given it to me. I've been unfair. With everything I've said against them... It's true that the people of these communities love one another. My problem is I don't have the courage.' (Since such people are very naturally religious, deep down they think the people of the community are phenomenal because on Saturdays, instead of going to the country, they go to church...) "With all the effort it costs me, I don't know where they find the will power to go to church."

People think you are earning heaven with great effort. The Church must salt and purify this natural religiosity. The Gospel must be announced to these naturally religious people. Then all these people will enter into dialogue and will be happy to be with the people of the communities and will discover that they are not sacrificing themselves, that it doesn't cost them to do what they do, that they do it with joy. Perhaps this person, when he is already very near Christianity, will get run over by a car and die. This person dies with Jesus Christ because he has had a Church beside him that helped him and enlightened him by loving and forgiving him. This Church is close to those who suffer, to the poor. It is Christ himself who loves and who has compassion on sinners. Everything the historical Jesus Christ

was, today the Church is, so men can see God through Christ and Christ through the Church that is his Body.⁷

The Church enlightens men without forcing them. In forgiving them, it is God himself who is forgiving them because a Christian is Christ and Christ is God. But this is not done by decree, putting the crucifix in every classroom or, if the state is Catholic, forcing everyone to go to Mass. There was a time when that could be done because of Christendom. In the future it will not happen.

Finally, there is a third circle, a third group of brothers and sisters, those who live a lie, who have always lied to themselves. They are those in whom Satan acts, enslaving them. Not necessarily because they are wicked, or due to any fault of their own, but perhaps for some reason or other that we will not investigate. Maybe these are the richest people, humanly speaking, the most intellectually gifted. (Judas was perhaps the brightest of the apostles, which is why he kept the purse...) These people cannot stand the community. This mission is very important because, without Judas, there is no Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. If you are called to be Jesus Christ, you must have your Judas. Each of you here will have your hour. Your life is in function of assuming an hour. Jesus Christ was waiting for his hour to arrive and one day he said: My hour has come (see Jn 12:23). I hope that one day all of you will be able to say the same: My hour has come, the hour to give testimony of Jesus, the hour to be raised up, the hour in which the Father will be glorified in you. All Christians are called by God to take on this hour.

When that day arrives, these people will have the mission of killing you, of destroying you. Fundamentally, they live dominated by the devil because they have never been loved. To be able to love himself and other people, a man needs to be loved. These people do not listen to your reasons; they do not recognize the Spirit. They say it's all too angelic and a form of alienation which provides you with an excuse never to have to lift a finger to do anything.

The only way for these brothers and sisters to be saved is for the Church to give her blood for them, the blood of Christians, which is the blood of Jesus Christ. They will kill you and you will give your blood for them, as St. Stephen gave his blood for those who stoned him. In that way, they can all be saved.

⁷ CCC 858: Jesus is the Father's Emissary. From the beginning of his ministry, he "called to him those whom he desired;... And he appointed twelve, whom also he named apostles, to be with him and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3:13-14). From then on, they would also be his "emissaries" (Greek *apostoloi*). In them, Christ continues his own mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21; see 13:20; 17:18). The apostles' ministry is the continuation of his mission; Jesus said to the Twelve: "he who receives you receives Me" (Mt 10:40; see Lk 10:16).

For the Church has the power to save everyone, whoever they are. Her mission is to save the world.

This last part means that the mission of the Church is that of the Servant of Yahweh, who takes on himself the sins of others. Here you need to speak a little of the Servant of Yahweh.

The Church can save everyone because she forgives everyone. And if the Church is Christ and Christ is God, it is God himself who has forgiven them.

The Church does not judge and she does not demand but she saves, heals, forgives, raises to life; and she does all this eschatologically.

FIFTH DAYWHO IS GOD FOR YOU?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: I believe in God (198-231); the Father (232-267); almighty and creator (268-324); God chooses Abraham (59-61, 562); God's covenant with Abraham (72, 2571); Abraham, father of all who believe (145-147; 2570-2573); God and the people of Israel (201, 203, 206, 210, 211, 218-221); "I know whom I have believed" (150-152); the Father revealed by the Son (238-242).

(Kiko)

We said that the catecheses we have given up to now have been rather like digging trenches in order to lay foundations. This is what we have done in the four catecheses of the preamble. Now we are going to put cement into the trenches so we can build the house. This we shall do in two catecheses that prepare for the Kerygma. They are two catecheses in which you dialogue with the people to prepare them to listen to the announcement of the Good News.

These catecheses are very difficult because you have to question the people. God inspired us with this catechesis in the community of Arguelles, in Paco's house. We had already asked these questions in the shantytowns with the gypsies, but in Arguelles they became more concrete. I did not know how to connect with these brothers and sisters and I could see they were going neither forward nor backward. So we began to ask them, Let's see, who is God for you?

In this way we began to dig. We felt the Holy Spirit acting with great force. Then, in Rome, in the community of the Canadian Martyrs, we found the answers. The answers are Carmen's, whom God greatly inspired in this. It was very interesting in Rome because God acted in us with power in front of Marxists and young atheists. It was the first time we had met Marxist university students of the Italian Students' Movement, people who were very involved politically. It was a difficult environment, but we spoke with them and they were very impressed. The Holy Spirit acted there with great force among those young people who we were afraid would tear us apart.

So these catecheses are in dialogue. In them, you need to ask the people questions. The last time I did this was in Barcelona with four hundred people and it did not turn out badly.

I always begin by apologizing. I have to ask questions and I understand that it is a great violence to have to give answers in public, for all of us are terrified of having to speak in front of others.

I say to the people: Imagine that I am a sincere atheist who is looking for God. I know that in this parish there is a group of Christians and I have come to ask them the reason for their faith. I ask for deep sincerity. We have not come to trick anyone but to exchange the little that each of us has.

I also tell the people that they come to the catecheses not merely to listen but so that God may truly act. I come here to talk to you in the hope that God may act. Humanly speaking, I have no desire whatsoever to give this catechesis, but I hope that God will really come: that he will pass and strengthen us, enlighten us, inspire us and that he will speak to you. It's the same with all the catecheses. You don't just push a button and out comes the catechesis. I'm always afraid when I have to give a catechesis. In fact, I'm already terrified at the thought that on Wednesday I have to give a catechesis in the parish of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. Although I have been doing this for several years, it's always the same. I don't know if the right words will come out today, what I will feel like, if people will come, if they will listen or not. In a word, each catechesis is a creation. The Lord must act because this is not a conference.

I tell the people that we are here in the hope that the Holy Spirit will come upon us, that he may speak, that he may empower and work in everyone. What helps me to give a catechesis is the absolute conviction that God wants to manifest himself, that God wants these people to know his love, to know the Good News. So I know that, in spite of me, because of the immense love God has for the people in front of me, even if they are proud, envious, sinful, scoundrel, precisely because they are like that he loves them even more and he wants to manifest himself to them. This helps me enormously. I know God will help them and that he will help me for them, not for me. It is not important whether at the end I am happy or not. What is important is that they really know Jesus Christ and God the Father through us, his useless servants. We are like dirty rags used to clean windows. When the windows are clean, the marvels of spring can be seen. They couldn't be seen before because the windows were fogged up. We are the rags used to clean the windows. Then the rags are thrown in a bucket and left there.

It is really the people who give this catechesis, not you, but the brothers and sisters who are there. You know something that many of them don't know. You know God is love, God is history¹ and he acts in the history of each person. You know God has been always acting in each one of them and you know that the love of God is present in all of their lives. That is why you

¹ CCC 218: In the course of its history, Israel was able to discover that God had only one reason to reveal himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as his special possession: his sheer gratuitous love (see Deut 4:37; 7:8; 10:15) And thanks to the prophets Israel understood that it was again out of love that God never stopped saving them and pardoning their unfaithfulness and sins (see Is 43:1-7; Hos 2).

CCC 219: God's love for Israel is compared to a father's love for his son (Hos 11:1). His love for his people is stronger than a mother's for her children (Is 49:14-15). God loves his people more than a bridegroom his beloved (Is 62:4-5); his love will be victorious over even the worst infidelities (Ezek 16; Hos.11); and will extend to his most precious gift: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16).

are on a way to become a Christian, because you have these spectacles, you have been enlightened about this reality. For the most part, people do not know this and they are blind with regard to their own histories. They haven't entered into the history of salvation. They haven't felt immersed in this plan of salvation God is carrying out in their lives. You do know this! Therefore ask them to talk about their lives, about their histories.

We won't speak of God saying: God is Omniscient; God is Omnipotent, making theories and speaking about the truth in a rationalistic way. For all the people listening to you may know a lot in this sense and still not feel saved from anything.

It is important in this catechesis that people give what is most genuinely religious in their lives: the clearest encounter they have had with God. You must lead the people a little to be enlightened about their own histories, to see how God has always acted in their histories, how God is near, within their histories, how God is the one who has made their histories.

To do this we ask some questions. The fundamental one is: Who is God for you? There is a series of questions: Of what use is God in your life? When have you met him?

Usually people give very vague answers. They generally give catechism answers. Perhaps someone will get up and say he does not believe. Then ask him why. When I see the dialogue becoming a discussion, I ask for a fact in the life of the person who is answering in which he really saw God. Not because God appeared to him or anything like that, but I ask for a fact in which this person has said: God is here; a fact in which he really had knowledge of God based on his experience; not because his parents told him or because he learned about it in a Catholic school. Rather, because there, independently of all this, he has known and experienced God.

People usually give marvelous replies because they really give experiences of their lives. I question the people for about an hour. With some, I talk at length.

There are two ways of giving this catechesis. One is to speak with only two or three people, helping them to go deeper, to come down to earth, dismantling their false concepts of God. (Eighty percent of the people have ideas and concepts of God that are false). Another way is to speak with several people.

You need to bring the people to discover that perhaps they have never known God. For they are blind and have never seen God in their lives. It is a way of taking them out of their alienation by confronting them with themselves.

I can also tell you that usually, when you begin to ask questions, many people take fright and go away and the next time the number drops, though at times it can even increase.

The important thing in this catechesis is that, since you know God is building their lives and their histories, you can succeed in getting the people to talk about their meetings with God. Thus, the catechesis is really given by the brothers and sisters through their own experiences. If there is someone who has not had this type of experience, perhaps he will discover

that he does not have faith. And he will ask himself: How is it possible that I have not had any encounter with God in my life? Perhaps I am so stupid and superficial that I have never thought about these things, or perhaps when they happen to me, I don't see God anywhere. This will help us to get to know the people and the environment in which we are speaking.

If you see someone is deceiving himself and being vague, ask him: Let's see. Do you believe in God? Where is God at this moment? People answer with things they have learned, not with things they have experienced. Where is this God? They will answer: Everywhere. Why do you say this; because you have been told that this is so? And maybe they say: Yes.

Don't worry about demolishing the false concepts people have of God. What is this God that you believe in like? He is everything in my life, they say. And, in saying that, they say nothing. What has God meant in your life? 90% of the people will not have thought about God that day. What use is God in your life? They all tell you: Everything. Without him I am nothing...

It is necessary to lead the people to discover that perhaps they don't believe in God. Or they believe in a God who sits up in heaven, while we are here on earth. We need him only when things go wrong. Fine, but this is the God of natural religiosity. This is not bad. But very few will speak to you of Jesus Christ and of the Father they have come to know in Jesus Christ.

(He goes on to ask these questions of the catechists present):

- Do you believe in God? Why do you believe in God?
- Why do you believe that God exists? Who told you?
- Do you believe God exists because others told you?
- What is this God you've been told about like?
- Who is God in your life? What is he like?
- What is this God to you in your life?
- Why is God of use to you? What does he do in your life? How does he affect and intervene in your history?
- Give the concrete facts in which you have seen God, experiences that confirm your faith.
- Sincerely, have you remembered God today?
- Do you pray, do you dialogue with God?

(Carmen)

Many people think the questions are an excuse, but this is not true. If the questions are well put, then the catechesis will take place in the dialogue itself. The first time we did this we did not follow it with a catechesis. The questions are not an excuse to entertain people. However, it's true that this is the most difficult of all the catecheses because you need the discernment of the apostle to discern about the person with whom you are speaking. This is a gift. This is why Jesus sends out

his apostles with the power to exorcise and to cast out demons; the apostle sees the person before him as if he were transparent.

You can see in the Gospels that Christ had many dialogues with people and with his apostles. For example, he asks them: Who do men say that I am? (Mt 16:5). Here we can see that dialoguing with people is a strong pastoral reality of the primitive Church. You will see that God always appears in the Scriptures as a tangible event for everyone, always. Everyone who has had an experience of faith has had a real meeting of revelation with God. Everything that is not this, despite the many things you have spoken here, is not the God of revelation who acts directly in historical events. So anyone who has not experienced events of God's intervention in his life does not have faith and does not have anything to be afraid of. God has not revealed himself to him, that's all. It doesn't mean he is good or bad.

(Kiko)

If someone discovers he does not have faith, he has two possibilities. He can either throw all of this out the window because he doesn't accept the fact that he has no faith, or he can embark on a way of faith and let himself be led by us to faith on a long way, that takes years, during which he will learn to pray and will be exorcised. But he must be patient because this is the journey of Israel. God takes his people into the desert and leads them where he wants. The people say: Why is he leading us through the desert? God knows his people very well and knows what they need. He knows that if he does not lead them through the desert they will then give to themselves the glory that belongs to God. Since in the desert there is neither bread nor water nor anything else, the only thing they can say if water appears in the desert is that it comes from God. Otherwise, they will believe they invented water. They will claim it as their own and if someone attempts to take it away, they'll take a knife and kill him because the water belongs to them. This people, God's chosen people, will always be stubborn, rebellious and will demand miracles.

The second temptation Jesus Christ had in the desert is exactly this: the temptation of the miracles. The evil one says to Jesus: But why on earth must you accept this grey, drab life of yours, the life of the son of a carpenter? No one is going to believe in you like this. You don't have a penny; you're starving; you're the son of a carpenter. The devil says: Don't you believe in the Word of God? Don't you say that the Word of God cannot fail? You have faith, haven't you? Then go up to the pinnacle of the temple when everyone is gathered below and say: Look! Here I come! As Scripture says, the angels will support you on their hands so you won't hurt your foot against a stone. Throw yourself off the pinnacle. You'll see that God will catch you and then everyone, amazed, will believe in you (see Mt 4:5-7).

What is the Church saying, in putting this temptation in Jesus Christ? This was the same temptation the people of Israel

had in the desert: to demand miracles, here and now, to tempt God because they don't want to walk where God wants them to go. They want to go where they want to go. They want God to enter into their minds because they don't accept any God outside themselves. Their only God is their reason, but they don't realize that if God could fit into their reason, he would be smaller than they and he wouldn't be able to save them from anything.² They say: This God is not love; God does not exist.

How does the devil tempt Jesus Christ? He invites him to deny his existential reality, not to become incarnate, not to accept his reality of the moment; not to accept his humanity, the fact of being an unknown ordinary man, like anyone else, of whom no one takes any notice.

He tempts him by inviting him to be different.

All of us have this temptation. We want to be Napoleon and St. Francis of Assisi at the same time, or Sophia Loren and St. Teresa rolled into one. And right now. If God doesn't give me what I want now, immediately, I'll stop walking, I'll deny him. The devil puts this temptation before us so that we do not accept our reality of today, precisely the one that God has given us. Perhaps you have masturbated five times and you are depressed and destroyed, because you don't accept yourself at all. This is the situation you're in and you don't want to accept it. The devil invites us to come out of our reality.

Scripture is history and we can enter into it only by entering into our own history, taking it on. He who escapes from his life, the one that God has given him, will not meet God. Take a good, firm grip of your reality, hope in God and transcend yourself.

Yet you are free to kick all of this out of the window.

With these questions you can see that what we are talking about are not theories. Instead, we say God is love and he manifests himself as love. To have faith is to have discovered this.

Baptism is like an enlightenment; it is to discover that your history is full of the love of God; to discover that one day he allowed you to be there.

For example, I remember a young man from Florence, who in front of everyone said: I am homosexual and I bless God with all my heart that I am like this. I went to a psychiatrist, but

² CCC 201: To Israel, his chosen, God revealed himself as the only One: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:4-5). Through the prophets, God calls Israel and all nations to turn to him, the one and only God: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God and there is no other... To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. 'Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength" (Is 45: 22-24; see Philem 2:10-11).

psychology never saved me. Today I can testify in front of all of you that I am saved through the power of Jesus Christ.

He said this because God had made him feel with immense power and see with immense clarity that God had permitted this in his life so that he would always cling to him. He felt the presence of God in his life so strongly that he was able to speak in front of everyone, that through this God had taken him for himself, that he knew he would never be separated from God, because this fact obliged him to cling always to God. And since in this God was revealing a marvel, this enlightened him interiorly. When, at the end, I approached him to say something about psychology, because I thought I was very clever, he stopped me and said: That's enough, brother. I've had more than enough of human words and I've read too many books. The only one who has saved me is Jesus Christ. There is no need for you to tell me that the tendency to homosexuality isn't all that bad, that people accept it nowadays, etc. I went through five years of psychoanalysis and it did me no good. The only thing it did was to keep me in a state of wretchedness, of feeling different from everyone else, full of anger against myself and everyone else.

This young man was able to say this because his entire existence had been enlightened. The Holy Spirit had enlightened his reality and now he can bless God because he starts to know Him and to discover that God is greater than he is. Previously he had wanted something else, to be God of himself.

By means of these questions we want to lead the brothers and sisters to discover that the God of Scripture is a God who intervenes in people's lives.³ What this boy was talking about is undoubtedly an intervention of God. This is an experience that must be lived through in order to be able to talk about it because this reality is very serious in a society like ours.

Possibly through these questions, the people will not discover that the God they have is the God of hearsay, a God whom they have been told about, but whom they have never really experienced. It is the God of Job (see Job 1-2). Job is a

³ CCC 203: God revealed himself to his people Israel by making his name known to them. A name expresses a person's essence and identity and the meaning of this person's life. God has a name; he is not an anonymous force. To disclose one's name is to make oneself known to others; in a way it is to hand oneself over by becoming accessible, capable of being known more intimately and addressed personally.

CCC 205: God calls Moses from the midst of a bush that burns without being consumed: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). God is the God of the fathers, the One who had called and guided the patriarchs in their wanderings. He is the faithful and compassionate God who remembers them and his promises; he comes to free their descendants from slavery. He is the God who, from beyond space and time, can do this and wills to do it, the God who will put his almighty power to work for this plan.

religious man, a very good man who believes in God because his parents told him about God. Nevertheless, God will intervene in his life in a series of events that, humanly speaking, he cannot accept. His sons and daughters die; he is left without land and cattle; he gets a revolting disease that causes him to go naked and scratch the pus from his sores with a potsherd. Everyone tries to give explanations, interpreting his history with their reason, telling him why all this is happening to him. He rejects it all, saying that God is greater than he is, that he doesn't need any reasons, that it is not true that God is punishing him because he has sinned. He doesn't understand, but he believes there is a God who is greater than all their reasoning. This experience ends with a profound confession. Job will see God face to face and he will say: Before I knew you because of hearsay, but now my very eyes have seen you (see Job 42:5).

There is an underlying catechesis here. You know Job is not an historical figure. The book of Job is like a sort of inspired play that gives an answer to suffering. There is a dialogue between God and the devil. The devil, who is an accuser, is constantly accusing us, telling us we are rubbish; he makes us experience a God of fear. This accuser tells God that Job is a good man who obeys the law, more or less, who prays, etc., because God loves him very much and has treated him well. He has given him marvelous sons and daughters and a beautiful life. But basically, Job is a rotter, Satan says, he is a wicked man, worth nothing. God says this is not true. No?, says the devil, then take away from him anything of what he has and see how he will turn against you and blaspheme! God says to the devil: You can touch his property. I permit you to take it all away from him, but do not touch his person. So Job is robbed of everything: he is left without money; and his sons and daughters die. Job replies to this by saying: Naked I came from my mother's womb. You gave me everything; you've taken away everything. Blessed be the Name of God. And the devil goes off with his tail between his legs because God has won.

Another day Satan says to God: What Job is really afraid of is that you will touch him more deeply, that he will die and this is why he lies. Touch him there and see how he will revolt, will curse you to your face and say that you are no good (man is capable of doing anything to save his life). God says: I permit it. You can touch his person, but don't kill him. And it happens that Job gets a terrible disease. Everyone says that this is happening because he is a sinner, that he is suffering as a punishment for his sins. Job insists it is not because of his sins because he is innocent. (This will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ).

The Book of Job comes to question any spirituality that says suffering is a punishment for sin. It also poses the problem of the suffering of the innocent, the true answer to which will be given in Jesus Christ. Behind the dialogues between God and the devil can be seen the fact that it is God himself who intervenes in the reality of men.

In this catechesis, after asking the questions, we present a number of people from the Old and New Testaments to see how they would reply to these questions.

First we ask Abraham; then a Hebrew who left Egypt to walk towards the promised land and who arrived there; and we ask the apostle St. Paul.

Man has many concepts of God. There are the different concepts arrived at by philosophers, artists, poets, theologians, astronomers, mathematicians, the natural religions, students of nature.⁴ But we shall speak of the GOD OF JESUS CHRIST; THE GOD WHO MANIFESTED HIMSELF IN THE SCRIPTURES.

How has God manifested himself in Scripture? Let us see how he let himself be known through several people. Let's begin with Abraham.

ABRAHAM

If we were to ask if he believed in God, Abraham would say yes. We know his answer because we have the Scriptures in our hands and we know his life. And if we asked: Who is God for you? Who is he for you, this God in whom you believe? How did you get to know him? Abraham would not begin to make speeches. He would not say: God is omniscient, omnipotent, etc. He would tell us his experience; he would tell us the story of his life. Here you must tell the story of Abraham's life.

What is Abraham's experience? Abraham is faith. In the first reading of yesterday's Mass, the Church invites us to begin a way with Abraham; she calls us to faith. This chapter twelve of Genesis explains what faith is. God does not write a treatise to tell us what faith is but gives us a Word called Abraham. Abraham is an historical fact. Do you want to know what faith is? Abraham is faith. If you see that what has happened to Abraham has happened to you, if you see that this Word is fulfilled in you, you have faith. But if this Word does not touch you at all, if your life has nothing to do with that of Abraham, the Word has judged you. It is telling you that you have it all wrong, that you are outside the way, even if you are a priest, or whatever you may be. The Word of God is where God manifests himself; it is God himself. If you want to know whether or not you have faith, look at yourself in Abraham. Even though you are in the community, perhaps some of you do not have faith. Rather, you have a God you yourselves have manufactured.

⁴ CCC 285: ...Some philosophers have said that everything is God, that the world is God, or that the development of the world is the development of God (Pantheism). Others have said that the world is a necessary emanation arising from God and returning to him. Still others have affirmed the existence of two eternal principles, Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, locked in permanent conflict (Dualism, Manichaeism). According to some of these conceptions, the world (at least the physical world) is evil, the product of a fall and is thus to be rejected or left behind (Gnosticism). Some admit that the world was made by God, but as by a watch-maker who, once he has made a watch, abandons it to itself (Deism). Finally, others reject any transcendent origin for the world, but see it as merely the interplay of matter that has always existed (Materialism)...

And so this God is of no use to you. Let us see who the God of revelation is.

For this is the God we bring you and in whose name we are speaking. For there are many kinds of gods. Each one of us has his or her own gods, but it has never occurred to us that we do not have faith. This can happen even to a priest. So it is time to give this some serious thought because it may be that within three years this priest will have been secularized, something he would never have thought possible. You can't fool around with God. This is much more serious than we can possibly imagine.

What would Abraham answer? He would tell us his experience.

I had no sons. And just by telling us that much, he would be convinced we would be sorry for him because, in his time not to have sons meant to be cursed by God and men. It meant to be a poor wretch, impotent. Not to have descendants, not to be able to prolong your life in another, was the worst thing that could happen in those days. It was a terrible situation to be in, in the culture to which Abraham belonged: a group of nomadic shepherds who lived in clans like the gypsies today, who always travelled in families, looking for pasture and water and defending them from others. Abraham had grown old and had come to realize that everything he had would pass to others who were not his sons. This was something very important at that time. In addition to this, he had no land of his own in which to be buried and to rest. To rest under the earth is a magical thing that belongs to natural religiosity and is deeply rooted in the reality of man.

Abraham would tell us that he had neither sons nor land in which to rest and so was utterly wretched. He was a nomad who wandered from place to place with his cows and lambs, accompanied by his whole clan. Fighting constantly took place with other tribes and other clans. Abraham would tell us exactly what the Scriptures say: when he was seventy-five and his wife was well past her childbearing years, when he no longer had the physical strength to make enough money to buy a land where he could rest, he fell into a deep crisis because he had neither a land nor sons. He asked himself: Who am I? Of what use am I? What am I worth? Who made me? There is a "midrash" which says that Abraham was a polytheist. Polytheism is the most natural of things: to believe in superior forces, good and evil spirits. Abraham, who was not a monotheist, must have thought: Of what use am I? Even animals are of some use, for they procreate and continue their species. What is the meaning of my life if I have no sons?

When Abraham finds that his life is meaningless, in the very moment he finds himself in that state of anguish, he hears the voice of a God different from the ones he had known up until then. He hears a word that promises him: I shall give you sons and a land. Leave your country, your kinsfolk, your clan and your securities. Don't you see that your clan and your securities have never given you what you most longed for? You are a failure. You've tried everything and you have seen that it has been impossible. With your strength, with your securities, with your efforts, you have failed. Now I am intervening. But

you must lean on me and not on your clan or your family or your brothers to defend you or to give you food. Leave them and, together with your wife, your two servants, your forty cows, your fifty lambs, start walking.⁵ I shall tell where you have to go.

Either Abraham believes, or he doesn't make a move. There are no other possibilities.

To listen to this Word means to leave and start off on a journey: this is faith.

Abraham leaves without knowing where he is going. God doesn't tell him where to go. For a long time God remains silent. And here we have this old man who has left his clan, his tribe and all his securities. This is crazy. But, with his wife, his servants and the animals, he starts out on a journey, even though he doesn't know where he is going. His wife must have said to him: What a fool you are. You're a complete idiot. What kind of man have I married? What on earth are we doing here? Don't you realize everything we have will be stolen from us? Can't you see we have no one to defend us? She must have nagged him like this and driven him mad all day long. But Abraham believed in this Word that promised him two things: a son and a land.

St. Paul says that Abraham hoped against all hope. He believed against all reason (see Rom 4:18). His wife must have said: which God spoke to you? You've been dreaming. You've become a senile old fool who is good for nothing anymore! You've made me leave my comfort and now they will steal everything from us. Abraham struggles on, carrying only a Word. He has nothing else.

This is a marvel: the Word of God is so powerful it can make a man get up and start walking. Abraham carries nothing except this Word, a promise sown in his heart; and with this he carries on.

He arrives in a country, and he sees a marvelous land. What a land! What olive trees! What harvests! The inhabitants are Canaanites, people who speak a foreign language he doesn't understand. He has almost forgotten the Word and God appears again. (With his wife's constant nagging he has come to half-doubt the Word.) But he has burnt his boats and he cannot go back. If he did, he'd be the laughing-stock of everyone. God appears to him again (we don't know how) and says to him: This land which you tread today as a stranger will be yours. As soon as God appears, Abraham says: Wait a minute! Don't go away! How do I know this is true? Give me a guarantee because I can't stand this uncertainty. Show me. Promise me. And God makes a pact with him, swears an oath, which reassures him and gives him confirmation and this gives Abraham some peace (see Gen 15).

⁵ CCC 59: In order to gather together scattered humanity God calls Abram from his country, his kindred and his father's house (Gen 12:1) and makes him Abraham, that is, "the father of a multitude of nations." "In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 17:5; 12:3 (LXX); see Gal 3:8).

Abraham would tell us all this. But even this would be meaningless if he did not say: Look, I am ninety. (He would call Isaac.) Isaac, come here. Do you see this boy? This is my son. And look, this is my wife. (Out would come an old woman.) This God who promised me something has not disappointed me.⁶ (All the psalms say this: I leaned on God and I was not disappointed.) Look, this boy is my son. Do you know what he is called? Isaac. The happiest day of my life was when I held this son of mine in my arms. I longed for this son for eighty years and the day I held him in my arms, when he was still red and unwashed, I laughed and laughed like a mad man. My wife laughed too (see Gen 21:6). That is why he is called Isaac, which means "laughter."

Jesus says in the Gospel: Abraham saw my day and laughed. The Pharisees say to him: How can he have seen your day when you are not yet fifty? Aren't we right to say you are mad? (see Jn 8:56-57).

Abraham saw the day of Jesus Christ when he saw that God, Yahweh, drew life from death, from the dead womb of his wife. He promises and he fulfills his promises. On that day, Abraham saw the day of Jesus Christ. "My hour has come," my day, the hour in which to pass from this world to my Father, the hour in which the Father is about to draw out a new creature from a dead person (see Jn 12:23; 13:1). This is faith: believing and experiencing. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete (see Jn 16:24). But do not impose conditions on God. Do not tempt him. Wait for him to grant what you want when he wants because when he wants to grant your desire, it will be much greater than anything you can imagine. God loves you and so does not grant your desire immediately because this would destroy you. He loves you much more than you love yourself. He will give it to you when he wants to.

Briefly told, this is the experience of Abraham. And this is a Christian. On this way you are waiting for this Isaac, for this Jesus, that we have promised you, to grow in you. A new creature will be born in you. Like Abraham, you have not been happy. For Abraham happiness meant a son and a land. For you happiness will be to find the meaning of your life, to have peace, to have joy, to have life. We have promised you that all this will be given to you. We said to you: Leave the realities in which you have lived up until today and start walking with us. We invited you to live with us in a community, in a caravan like that of the people of Israel. Wait and the promise will be fulfilled. And you wait because you experienced something yesterday, a glimpse of something; otherwise you would have gone

⁶ CCC 303: The witness of Scripture is unanimous that the solicitude of divine providence is concrete and immediate ; God cares for all, from the least things to the great events of the world and its history. The sacred books powerfully affirm God's absolute sovereignty over the course of events: "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases" (Ps 115:3). And so it is with Christ, "who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens" (Rev 3:7) As the book of Proverbs states: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established" (Prov 19:21).

away. In some way, this word is already beginning to be fulfilled. If not, you wouldn't be here like a fool and we would be brainwashing you.

This is what it is to be on a way and to wait. Like Mary who believes without understanding it, that a woman can have a child without going to bed with a man. Mary believed, as Abraham believed,⁷ that God could fulfill what he had promised because God is omnipotent, that it is he who draws life from death, that it is he who can make of your heart a new heart. He can give you the heart of Christ. You will accomplish the Sermon on the Mount without effort because the Holy Spirit will accomplish it in you. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and will gestate Jesus Christ in you.

The Holy Spirit is already upon you (those of you for whom this is true). It will be seen in the catechumenate who has the Holy Spirit and who does not.

For the person who has the Holy Spirit begins to do works, little ones. And we are the ones who have to see these attitudes, not you. God will not let you judge yourself; otherwise you'd become very proud. It is the Church who will say to you: the Holy Spirit is present here. The catechumenate is this, a time in which the Spirit gestates Jesus in you.

In the primitive Church, at the end of the catechumenate, the Bishop came with Baptism to confirm whether or not there was a new creature in the catechumen. At Baptism this child is born. The one who doesn't have this child within him cannot enter Baptism. He has a hysterical pregnancy and cannot give birth to anything.

Do you see how God manifested himself in the concrete history of Abraham, as the one who, from death, takes out life? God intervenes in the history of Abraham. God is not some series of truths to which you must adhere intellectually. God is a Word that has put Abraham in motion; a Word that is his history itself, that made him walk. God carries out the history of salvation with Abraham. This is why we speak of the history of salvation.

A HEBREW

If we were to ask a Hebrew, what would he say to us? The same thing. He would tell us his story.

⁷ CCC 165: It is then we must turn to the witnesses of faith : to Abraham, who "in hope... believed against hope" (Rom 4:18); to the Virgin Mary, who, in "her pilgrimage of faith," walked into the "night of faith" (LG 58; John Paul II, RMat 18) in sharing the darkness of her son's suffering and death; and to so many others: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:1-2).

When I was a child, he would say, I saw how they beat my father in Egypt till they left him half-dead. I saw my father wasting away, making bricks day and night. In my home I saw hunger, tears, bitterness and hatred against the oppressors. We found ourselves in a situation of death that we couldn't bear any longer.

Then he would tell us about the Exodus: how God sent Moses to lead his people out of the slavery of Egypt into freedom; how he opened the sea for them, burying all of their enemies once and for all; how they crossed the desert and arrived at a marvelous, fertile land; how they overcame all their enemies. He would say: God gave us this land that you see here today. I have seen the hand of God in our history.

Here again, God does not appear as a set of truths. He is a God who acts in man, who saves by entering into the lives of men, changing their lives.⁸ I have told you that the Church is an event. The event is that I, Kiko Arguello, Carmen, Jesús and others, are speaking here. This is the event. This is the Church: that the risen Christ continues to change people's lives and histories. This is the Church and not a philosophy. We are not indoctrinating you, nor is the Gospel, as some leftist groups think, a book you have to put into practice at all costs, like Marx's *Das Kapital*. The Sermon on the Mount is revealed truth, isn't it? Well then, everyone must strive to put it into practice!

ST PAUL

If we were to ask St. Paul, he'd tell us his story, his experience. What would he tell us? He had been a Pharisee who persecuted Christians. He had been educated by Gamaliel, a learned Pharisee. Zealous for the purity of Jewish tradition, he persecuted the Christians as a heretical sect. One day, while on the road to Damascus with a band of soldiers to arrest some members of this sect, Jesus appears to him in the form of a radiant light. Paul was thrown to the ground and blinded. A voice said to him: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (see Acts 9:1-9). And Paul would point out that the people who

⁸ CCC 207: By revealing his name God at the same time reveals his faithfulness which is from everlasting to everlasting, valid for the past ("I am the God of your fathers"), as for the future ("I will be with you") (Ex 3:6, 12). God, who reveals his name as "I AM," reveals himself as the God who is always there, present to his people in order to save them.

CCC 214: God, "He who is," revealed himself to Israel as the one "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6). These two terms express summarily the riches of the divine name. In all his works God displays not only his kindness, goodness, grace and steadfast love, but also his trustworthiness, constancy, faithfulness and truth. "I give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness" (Ps 138:2; see Ps 85:11). He is the Truth, for "God is light and in him there is no darkness"; "God is love," as the apostle John teaches (1 Jn 4:8).

had been with him and heard the voice were still alive. They didn't see the light, but they were terrified.

I assure you, he would say, in this Jesus I find the fulfillment of what I inherited from my fathers and I worship the real God because He is the promised Messiah.

He would tell his history. St. Paul cannot speak of Jesus Christ without recounting his history. He does this all the time in his letters.

And if we were to ask Jesus Christ: Who is the Father...? Here we would see the God of Jesus Christ. Seeing Jesus Christ, we see the Father (see Jn 14:9).⁹ Jesus is the one who gave his life for his brothers and sisters, thus showing the mercy of the Father towards all the poor and all the sinners.

⁹ CCC 240: Jesus revealed that God is Father in an unheard of sense: he is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father by his relationship to his only Son who, reciprocally, is Son only in relation to his Father: "No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27).

SIXTH DAYWHO AM I?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: Man (355-384, 1700-1876); the mystery of evil (164, 272, 309-314, 324, 385); the mystery of suffering (164, 1500-1502); death (400, 401, 1006-1014); the temptations of Jesus (538-540); John the Baptist (523, 696, 717-720, 796).

(Kiko)

The purpose of this catechesis is to help prepare for the kerygma. In the previous catechesis we tried to dismantle some of the ideas we all have about God through a dialogue with the people. We said that faith is not only to adhere to a series of ideas or truths, nor does it mean believing that there exists a God who created everything. Faith is fundamentally a personal meeting with God, with Jesus Christ, the author of faith for all men (see Heb 12:2) and the one who leads us to the Father. The fullness of faith is given in Jesus Christ.

We have seen that there are many ways to get to God: through reason, philosophy, art, contact with nature, one's own feelings, etc. and we have tried to demonstrate, through the history of salvation, concretely with Abraham, with one of the Hebrews who came out of Egypt and with St. Paul, that God's manifestation to these people was not only a matter of their believing in certain truths but of their experiencing the action of God in their concrete lives. For them, faith was an actual meeting that brought them to a true change of existence, enabling them to pass from a situation of slavery to a new situation of freedom. They passed from being failed, frustrated people, in some way lacking meaning, to being people who saw God fulfilling his promises.

God is the one who takes the initiative and calls men. He makes a covenant with them; he promises various things; and he fulfills his promises.

Above all, in the previous catechesis we tried to get people to think a little about the concepts they have of God and the type of faith they have in such a way that, if someone discovers he has an inadequate and immature faith, he may come with joy and hope to seek faith in this Way. This is so that someone who has a naturally religious faith in which he selfishly uses God for his own desires can truly become aware of this. It is possible that he might come to this awareness through the experiences of others and so might dismantle his false concepts of God. In the last catechesis we were not asking much: only to get people to think a little, to dialogue and to consider what ideas they have about God.

In today's catechesis we are going to take a further step. What meaning does God give your life? Does he help you to live? Let us see. Maybe we'll discover that we live without questioning the meaning of life. And when life becomes unbearable, we seek some form of alienation to escape this

suffering. We lean on the idols of the world.¹ When they fail, we go to religion (as many people said the last time) to seek consolation and hope for our human failures.

When religion demands too much of us, we feel defeated before we begin; we have a sense of being impotent. We say: "I'm not a saint! I'm not Jesus Christ!" It never crosses our minds that we can be heroic or give our money to the poor and so we tend to avoid religion.

Basically, we'll continue on the same line, facing man with the faith that he has. This is very difficult.

In the last catechesis we saw that God exists, that he is near, that he lets himself be found.

(Carmen)

When one of the people listening really has faith, his experience is a wonderful enlightenment for the others. In fact, this catechesis and the previous one were born from dialogues with the people.

I remember a girl in Rome who said she had really seen God in nature, in the flowers, in beauty, etc. And it's true because man has the capacity to discover God through reason. Through philosophy, man discovered God as prime cause, discovered the existence of God.

But more than all this, there is a God revealed in the concrete, personal history of a people. This revelation, which has marked the historical experience of this people, was perceived by the people itself. This is faith: that God let himself be known by his people. They experienced that God really opened the Red Sea for them.

Many people saw Jesus Christ, but not everyone recognized him. But the Apostles were enlightened to know that Jesus was God, was the Lord.

God's revelation is God's work. It is far beyond philosophical and human ways of discovering him. But there are people among those listening to you who have not had this revelation of God. The Church, like the people of Israel, is a point in history. These are not the best people, but they are elected for a mission within history. And so you will see there are many people who come to the catechesis who have not had a true experience of God, even if some of them are priests and nuns.

¹ CCC 2113: Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship. It remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example, satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt 6:24). Many martyrs died for not adoring "the Beast" (See Rev 13-14) refusing even to simulate such worship. Idolatry rejects the unique Lordship of God; it is therefore incompatible with communion with God (See Gal 5:20; Eph 5:5).

Today it is fashionable to say faith is a doubt or a leap in the dark or a gamble, as Pascal said. This is not true. Faith is not a doubt for St. Paul, nor for the Apostles, nor for Israel. They are sure about the presence of God in their lives. Rather than give a demonstration of the existence of God or treatises on what God is, the Bible shows God present and acting throughout the entire history of salvation.

Israel is God's witness. Israel does not offer demonstrations of God's existence but confesses that he exists in history. This is very strong.

People who are caught up by God feel that this is totally gratuitous. They don't feel better than other people. On the contrary, they confess the gift of the power of God.

You have to show the people that the image of God they have, true as it may be, is perhaps not the result of a Christian experience that would enable them to become witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world. Therefore they are invited to begin a way toward Christianity. The fact that they are there listening to you is a sign that God is choosing them to begin this way.

(Kiko)

This is important, but it is very difficult. It is my current difficulty in the parish of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. You don't know how secure these people are when they speak, as a consequence of a certain kind of Spanish Catholicism where not one of them doubts that he is a perfect Christian. You come to understand how it's possible even to kill in the name of Jesus Christ.

The personal experiences of people are worth more than giving theories and producing dissertations. With time the theories are dismantled, as you have seen in your own communities. There are always people who don't want to get off their high horses, but the Lord takes care of that during the pre-catechumenate. He sees to it that they come to see their sins in their own hands when they are not able to accept others, when they envy someone, etc. Then they begin to understand that the Christianity they thought they had is useless if it is not a reality based on experience.

I always begin this catechesis with an anecdote from the *Dutch Catechism*. I don't know it very well, but I remember that when it was in fashion, I opened it once and saw that it began with an anecdote that I use in this catechesis.

Fundamentally, this catechesis shows the people that perhaps the Christianity they have is no good in their lives. The catechesis calls them to look at their true reality. The reality of every man is that he is moving towards death. This catechesis invites people to become conscious of their weakness, of their reality of today, because this catechesis is a preparation for the announcement of Jesus Christ.

These catecheses that we give before announcing the kerygma are like John the Baptist. John the Baptist calls people to sincerity, honesty and truth. He doesn't moralize. He puts

people in front of their stark reality. This is what we want to do: to call man to conversion, to put himself in his reality, to get him to come out of his alienation and make contact with reality, to look at himself without disgust and fear, because we are bringing him good news. It is precisely because Jesus Christ is coming that we can invite him to look at his reality and we help him with this in this catechesis.

I start by telling the story from the *Dutch Catechism* of some Christian monks who arrive in a northern country and speak about Jesus of Nazareth. They preach and everyone follows them. The king wants to come to a decision about them and sends for his counselors. One of the wise men gives this answer to the king: Your majesty, you are here one day in this room with your nobles. The fire is lit because it's winter and there is a big snowstorm. It's night and suddenly a little bird escaping from the storm flies in through the window and begins to fly around the room. You look up, see the bird circle the room a few times and fly off again, lost in the darkness and the storm. Your majesty, this is man. The warm, lighted room is the world. We are the little bird. We come from the storm, from darkness, without knowing from where we come. We live a few years on the earth and then we turn to go back into the night without knowing where we are going. We don't know from where we come, nor to where we go. If these men can give us an answer to this, they should be made welcome.

The catechesis and the *Dutch Catechism* begin with this story, saying with it that Christianity is the answer to the reality of man.

I go on saying that there is no doubt that man has always tried to somehow explain to himself who he is, who we are, where we come from and where we are going, who created us and why we are here on earth.²

Man feels small and weak in front of the storms and the events of nature that are beyond his control, in front of sickness and of death. He needs to explain to himself who he is, why there are death, illness and wars. If he had answers to these questions, he could begin to find himself, to find the meaning of his life. Without this, he feels lost. Man needs to find an answer to the mystery of his own existence.

All philosophies and religions emerged as answers to this question: Who am I? No one has asked any of us here our permission for us to exist. We came into the world, we appeared, at a specific historical moment. We are not plants or dogs, we

² CCC 282: Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves (NA 2): "Where do we come from?" "Where are we going?" "What is our origin?" "What is our end?" "Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?" The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions.

are people and each of us is different from the others. We came into existence at a specific historical moment in which there has been great development in technology and we find ourselves in a world perhaps much more comfortable than that of our ancestors. There has been great progress in technology: medicine has been greatly developed; the moon has been reached; the earth is well populated; we live in big cities; many of the secrets of nature have been discovered. As a result, religiosities that explained natural phenomena in a magical way, trying to exorcise them, have been discarded. For we have discovered many things, phenomena that have an explanation and we no longer need to explain them by referring directly to God.

But the fundamental question remains unanswered: who are we? Who created us? What is life? Progress gives no answers to these questions. The more man knows, the more he remains perplexed and the more he asks himself: who are we and why?

We too must ask ourselves: who are we? Why do we exist? Certainly it appears pointless to ask questions about life because, in reality, man doesn't usually ask himself these things. He is satisfied to live without worrying about why he lives. But this doesn't seem to be enough. There is always a moment when man needs to know, to ask himself, to stop and reflect on the questions his existence and his life present to him.³

In this catechesis I call on the people to become aware of reality. I invite them for a moment to stop living without thinking because, deep down, all our actions, our whole historical life, provide an answer to what life itself is.

What question does life present to us? Our life is driven toward fulfillment and man tries to find this fulfillment; but the question is finiteness, limitation, the inability to realize oneself, the inability to experience fulfillment in this life. When a boy or a girl falls in love, when a man works, paints,

³ CCC 385: God is infinitely good and all his works are good. Yet no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures: and above all to the question of moral evil. Where does evil come from? "I sought whence evil comes and there was no solution," said St. Augustine (*Conf.* 7, 7, 11) and his own painful quest would only be resolved by his conversion to the living God. For "the mystery of lawlessness" is clarified only in the light of the "mystery of our religion" (2 Th 2:7; 1 Tim 3:16)...

CCC 309: If God the Father almighty, the Creator of the ordered and good world, cares for all his creatures, why does evil exist? To this question, as pressing as it is unavoidable and as painful as it is mysterious, no quick answer will suffice... *There is a not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of evil.*

CCC 1500: Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death.

studies, climbs a mountain, fights a war, or writes a book, deep down he is trying to answer the question he has inside himself: dissatisfaction. This is the most serious question that life puts before us. Man's limitations produce frustration and dissatisfaction. And man does not want to be frustrated because to be frustrated is to stop being. Man feels a call to be, to live.

I always use this example: if we get on a bus with a tape recorder and do a survey (like on television) and we ask: Sir, would you mind answering some questions? And we ask: Where are you going? He would say: To my brother-in-law's house. We've arranged to go and visit him because he's not well. Where does he live? On Maple Street; I'll be there in three stops. Then we ask someone else: And where did you get on the bus? He would say: At Fifty-ninth Street. And why have you taken the bus? Because it's more comfortable. Usually I take the subway, but I like the bus because I'm getting old and I like to get a seat.

Everyone knows where he is going and from where he is coming. Then we go back to the first man we questioned: You, sir, what are you living for? He would say: What a question! That's a difficult one to answer. I live to work, to look after the family. Do you have children? Yes, I have three. The oldest is 23 and he works. The second is at university and the girl is working.' This man would keep on telling you all about his life to avoid answering the question. Well, sir, you live to work. Suppose you win the lottery, would you keep on working? Of course not. Then you live to make money, not to work. Of course! Money is very necessary in this life, especially today.

The surprise we'd get is that most people don't know what they are living for. When you ask a man on a bus where he is going and from where he has come, he'll answer you without any hesitation. Were someone to remain silent because he didn't know where he had gotten on or where he was going, we'd wonder about him. Anyone who takes a bus does so for some reason. When someone does something without knowing why, he's raving mad. Even someone who takes the bus just for the trip has a reason. All of you who have come here are here for some reason. But it is amazing when the deep reason for our existence, the one that would give meaning to our life, doesn't exist. If we don't know its purpose, our life lacks meaning and is completely empty.

When I worked as a laborer at Sade, near Madrid, with José Agudo, I asked some of the workers why they were living and for what. No one knew why he lived nor why he existed. They simply said: to work. And what do you work for? To make money. And what do you want money for? To live. What do you live for? They were astounded. It's true. What am I living for? Finally, a worker told me he would not go away unless I explained this to him because for several days he'd been very worried and upset. This really happened. Then some of them went to ask the boss if he knew why he lived and he said no. They asked the engineer too and he didn't know and this made him feel embarrassed. The workers realized they were living to work, working to make money, making money to eat, to dress, deep down, to live. But to live for what?

A lot of people say, When I was 18 year's old, I thought about this, but then I got married and I don't have time anymore to think about it. Now I have other problems. Sometimes when I'm sad or sick I think about it a little. Usually I don't.

The aim of this catechesis is to make people aware that, if a man has no direction, his actions have no meaning either. We know why we do everything we do, but we don't know what we are living for. So what meaning does life have?

In poorer countries, where people still have many material preoccupations, the house, money, they live for these things. But in the richer countries, where there is a lot of spare time because there are four-day work weeks, people get terribly bored because they don't find meaning in their lives and there are many suicides. When a man becomes aware that he has not found a meaning for his life, he becomes aware that he is dead. In Sweden, people live projecting their energies on the problems of the third world to escape this problem. In this way they try to give some kind of meaning to life.

For us, to be a man is to live without being alienated. To be a man means to be fully conscious of one's own reality; to be conscious of who we are and where we are going. At the very least, one has to ask himself the question in order to try to live life as it is. This is the purpose of this catechesis.

If you don't know who you are, you are living an alienated life. You get up, you have breakfast, you go to work, you have lunch, you go back to work, you watch television, you have dinner and you go to bed. That's how you solve the practical problems life presents to you. If the world were totally absurd, this would be the way to live, without complications. To live the life of a vegetable, or to live like a dog that eats from the leftovers and has no worries.

A lot of people live like this. The Spanish middle class and most other people live like this. They live looking forward to going to the country, to getting to a football game, or going to the cinema, etc. This way of living is a sign, a response. We say we are Christian believers, but by our way of living we are practical atheists because our actions do not have an eschatological dimension; they are not projected towards the future. We live the "today" and we try to escape from time because time without meaning destroys us. This is to kill time, to distract ourselves. For time runs on like a clock and tells us that we are going towards our destruction.

Time cannot be spent uselessly. We have to spend it doing something worthwhile, something real, something that is true, something fruitful. That's why people look for what is authentic. Religions are basically attempts to find what is true, what is lasting. And since time is precisely what announces to you that you are not immortal, that you die, that you go away, you find time meaningless. If you were conscious that you are dying, that your life is totally meaningless, you would stop doing what you are doing, because the time you are spending now and the time you will spend in the future is a time of death. You wouldn't be able to go on living. You'd kill yourself. When time no longer has meaning, it becomes

asphyxiating and the only way to get away from it is to exorcise it, to make it eternal, which is what all the religions do. For this reason, to distract myself, to play, is a way to run away, to alienate myself, to escape from relentless time, from time that is carrying me towards death, from time that is under a curse.

Here I use an example. Diogenes, the Cynic, was a man who went around searching for something in the daytime, in the full light of day, through the streets with a lighted lamp. Everyone thought he was crazy. People asked him: What are you doing with a lighted lantern in the middle of the day? He answered: I am looking for a man. He was looking for a man who would take on life in its full dimension, who would not become alienated; a man who would not live life only partially, who would not live in lies and deceit.

I invite the people listening to me to put themselves in front of their own realities, in front of the realities of their lives today. What is your life today? What is the meaning of your life today? How do you use your time? What meaning does your life have?

St. Paul says if you are in the eschatological time, in the time of the feast, if your time has been redeemed by Jesus Christ, then you are in the feast, you are king of your life (see Eph 5:16). Is your life really like that? This is what Jesus Christ is calling us to.

Here you need to awaken the consciousness of the people, that is, to call man to conversion, to call him to face his reality, which is perhaps petty and boring.

You know I went through a time when I was an atheist. I spent a whole year doing nothing and I didn't know what to do to escape from myself. I spent my life playing chess, hour after hour. It was like a cancer, eating me from the inside. I remember that something in me told me that life really could not be like that, that a man's life couldn't be burnt away so simply, that it couldn't be thrown away as I was doing. I looked for my own pleasure in everything, doing everything I wanted. If I wanted to stay in bed all day, I did. I had no strength to get out from this. I invite you to live among artists. I felt that my life was being destroyed, that someone was taking it to throw it in the garbage. I felt that someday my life would change because life couldn't be like that, but I had no strength for anything. All day long in a bar, playing chess until four o'clock in the morning.

During that time my father saw that I was completely destroying myself, but he didn't try to intervene. My father knew perfectly well that my condition was much more serious than anyone imagined. I was in a terrible internal drama. The Lord was allowing me to descend to the depths. Nothing mattered to me, not art nor my career, nothing. I was at the point of committing suicide. I missed doing so by very little.

There is a book by Camus, an existentialist writer, called *Caligula*. It presents the Emperor Caligula, not as a mad man, but as an intellectual who looks for the meaning of life in the logic of nature, of the senses, of sex and of the desires. He

decides to do everything he desires, to allow himself every pleasure. He has all the women he wants, he eats and drinks whatever he likes. Since this can't be done in society, for the police would stop it, Camus placed this experience in an all-powerful Roman emperor. He kills his best friend and he kills his mother and father. He goes to bed with his friends' wives; he makes his horse the god of the empire. Everyone has to do what he says. Caligula does all this looking for the meaning of life. He seeks happiness doing absolutely everything he wants. But he doesn't find it. In the end, he looks at himself in the mirror and smashes it. He has found nothing.

If you think that this is what makes for happiness, go on, do all that you want. This man has everything. Nevertheless, the more he indulges himself, the less happy he is. His life becomes unbearable. He satisfies all his whims and does not find happiness.

Life presents us with a fight, the fight to answer a question: Who am I?

In this catechesis I call people to be aware of this fight, to be conscious of their own realities. I do this in order to prepare the way for Jesus Christ because he is the one who has really answered this fight.

This can be seen precisely in Jesus' temptations in the desert.⁴

Jesus was subject to the same temptations as you and I. He was subjected to the temptation of alienating himself, of escaping from his own reality, of not entering into his own existential reality, of not taking on the whole of his life just as God presented it to him: to be the son of a carpenter, to live with his widowed mother in a poor village, in a country that was dominated by the Romans and where religion was dominated by the casuistry of the Pharisees. He was presented

⁴ CCC 538: The Gospels speak of a time of solitude for Jesus in the desert immediately after his baptism by John. Driven by the Spirit into the desert, Jesus remains there for forty days without eating; he lives among wild beasts and angels minister to him. (See Mk 1:12-13) At the end of this time Satan tempts him three times, seeking to compromise his filial attitude toward God. Jesus rebuffs these attacks, which recapitulate the temptations of Adam in Paradise and of Israel in the desert and the devil leaves him "until an opportune time." (Lk 4:13)

CCC 539: The evangelists indicate the salvific meaning of this mysterious event: Jesus is the new Adam who remained faithful just where the first Adam had given in to temptation. Jesus fulfills Israel's vocation perfectly: in contrast to those who had once provoked God during forty years in the desert, Christ reveals himself as God's Servant, totally obedient to the divine will. In this, Jesus is the devil's conqueror: he "binds the strong man" to take back his plunder. (See Ps 95:10; Mk 3:27) Jesus' victory over the tempter in the desert anticipates victory at the Passion, the supreme act of obedience of his filial love for the Father.

with the temptation of not taking on his reality but of escaping from it.

The devil invites him to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple. He says to him, How can you accept to be an ordinary man? Throw yourself from the pinnacle of the temple. You know that the Word of God cannot fail. Doesn't Scripture say that the angels will hold you up so that you will not hurt your foot on a stone? If you throw yourself from the temple, this Word will be fulfilled in you. The angels will hold you up, the people will be amazed and they will all believe in you. But Jesus answers, It is also written: you shall not tempt the Lord your God (see Mt 4:5-7).⁵

This is the same temptation Israel had in the desert: Water now, not tomorrow (see Ex 17:1-7). We all have this temptation: not to accept this wife of yours, these children, this work you have. You would like things to be much better. You do not accept your existential reality of today.

This is important, for without this there is no conversion. This is why Jesus says: Whoever wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me (Lk 9:23). Today's cross, today's reality, not tomorrow's. Accept your reality. There's no use saying, I will follow Jesus Christ if he gets me out of this, if he changes these things for me. No. Take this reality in which you find yourself today.

In order, therefore, to be able to announce Jesus Christ, it is necessary to place man in his reality, for if man is not in his own reality, he is not aware of being enslaved by sin and death and so he cannot ask for salvation because he doesn't even see the need for it. He doesn't feel that he is sick; he doesn't have problems; he lives and that's all. In his married life he doesn't talk to his wife any more. They go to the movies, to go to see something or other. They have children. Their only problem is that one of the children is sick and that's all! It's how they live.

Who will tell such a man that he has no faith, that he is destined for death? He'll say: What nonsense you're talking, what a fuss, how complicated you make things!

We live in a very alienated way, content with our flat and petty lives. To call men to conversion is to call them to their own deep reality. So, be careful with certain concepts of a good, ever-merciful God... for life is much more serious. Come with me, all of you who have concepts of God like some pictures of the Sacred Heart with a little hand like that and a retouched face, all sugar and honey, smooth and tender... Let's go to the

⁵ CCC 2119: Tempting God consists in putting his goodness and almighty power to test by word or deed. Thus Satan tried to induce Jesus to throw himself down from the Temple and, by this gesture, force God to act (See Lk 4:9). Jesus opposed Satan with the word of God: "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test" (Dt 6:16). The challenge contained in such tempting of God wounds the respect and trust we owe our Creator and Lord. It always harbors doubt about his love, his providence and his power (See 1 Cor 10:9; Ex 17:2-7; Ps 95:9).

slums to see a woman whose husband gets drunk and beats her every night, who has a son in jail and another half-stupid; a woman who gets up every morning at five o'clock to go and scrub floors and has nothing to eat. Let's go there and ask her about this Jesus who is so sweet... Let's go see the prostitutes, the pimps, the messes, the drug addicts, the war in Vietnam, the rotting corpses. Let's see this God you have, so gentle, this life that is so ordered, where everything goes well, everything is so nice!

No! Life is much more serious than that and we cannot make a caricature of it. This papier-mâché God does not exist. The God of the Bible is not like that. He is a God who chooses a people and gives them graces that he does not give to any other nation so that they can fulfill their mission. But woe to this people if it is unfaithful because the curse will be tremendous. He is a God who both curses and blesses. It depends.

We shall see in this catechesis that Jesus is the one who takes on this fight because he is the total man and he is the one who can bring us to this total humanity. I invite you to look at your life as it is today, not the one of yesterday nor even the one of tomorrow, the one of today.

St. John the Baptist calls man to conversion and says: I baptize you in water for repentance, but after me comes one whose sandals I am not fit to unloose (see Mk 1:7-8).⁶ Where does the preaching of John the Baptist lead to? To this deep reality: to make man aware of his reality of sin. This is why he gets angry when the Pharisees, afraid of the strong words they have heard, go after him to see what this madman is going to say next (see Mt 3:7-10). Jesus says: John came and you said he was possessed by the devil. The Son of Man comes and you say he is a glutton and a drunkard (see Mt 11:18-19). John the Baptist calls them to conversion with strong words and says to them: brood of vipers... because they need conversion and they do not acknowledge it. For they are ready to do rites as if they were something magic. To enter into conversion is not this. It is to become conscious of one's own reality of frustration, to take on your own life fully.

The same for the temptation of bread (see Mt 4:2-4). Israel had the same one (see Ex 16:1-3). The people of Israel saw that what separated them from God was the continual temptation of wanting security in everything, of wanting the assurance of having money and bread above all else. In the desert they won't walk unless they are given bread and meat. They miss the garlic and onions of Egypt (see Num 11:4-6). The devil tempts Jesus in the same way and says: Are you hungry? Don't be an idiot. Tell these stones to change into bread. Why are you suffering needlessly? Are you not the Son of God?

⁶ CCC 696 ... John the Baptist, who goes "before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk 1:17;) proclaims Christ as the one who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Lk 3:16). Jesus will say of the Spirit: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled" (Lk 12:49).

I would like to ask you: why should you suffer? Why do you have to be sick? Why should you have so little money? Certainly not! You should have lots and so you need to work like mad for it. Before anything else, insure yourself against every risk. Study, son, study! Then you will have a good position and a good car. And we sell our souls to the devil, if necessary, to get all this. We run, run, run, because we are in an epoch of consumption and there is no time to waste. Your father gets angry if you don't pass your exams. You must study. You have to work a lot, make lots of money. And we don't have time for anything else.

I remember a boy I was calling to conversion who said to me: Look, I have to get into the school of agricultural engineering first and it's very difficult. I promise you this: when I manage to get in, then I will listen to you. Well, I'm still waiting. He had staked all his happiness on getting into the school of engineering and when he got there he had other problems. He had to find work, then he got married, etc. Always in a hurry. There is no time to listen.

Man does not live on bread alone but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God. Today, people inside the Church who are influenced by Marxism have made of this Word what they want. They say: Man does not live on the Word of God alone, but also on bread. And so they say that the first thing to do is provide bread and then we will see. If you don't give bread to people first, they say, it's useless to speak to them about God because no one listens with empty stomachs. These people don't fool me because I have lived in a shantytown, in the slums and I know how things really are. They do not fool José Agudo either. This temptation is very serious and is deep within man's heart: the first thing to do is insure your life.

When a child is born into a family, his first problems are family problems, with his mother and father. His first cosmos is the one of his family, in which, through the father and mother, he learns what is good and evil and he learns to discern. He develops social relationships through his brothers and sisters and school. Then, when he becomes adult, he encounters social problems because he has to work to find a place in life. Then he discovers that life has social and political aspects, since we have to help others because we live in society. He will strive to succeed, to make money, to separate himself from his family to form his own family. But throughout his existence he will have to discover that his true, deep problems are neither the familial, the social, nor the political ones. Fundamentally, they are the existential, tragic ones. Everything he does is vanity of vanities if he fails to answer these problems. Man is a being walking towards death who has to answer to this reality: Who am I? What am I living for?

I am a man moving towards death and if, with death, I come to an end, my life has no meaning. I am an absurdity. And, if my life is an absurdity, why do all these things? My life has no direction because if the world is an absurdity, then good and evil do not exist. Everything is then based on what is most convenient. What today is good, tomorrow we can call evil. There are merely sociological laws that allow coexistence within

society. This is one concept of life. Maybe it could be an answer.

Our society is a consumers' society, a narrow-minded, middle class society, where we have exchanged Christian values for middle class values: to be honest at work, to have a house and a car, to be faithful to your wife, not to steal and kill. Nothing else is asked of anyone. When he achieves these, man's life achieves balance. This is a very serious catechesis that we receive from our environment. Success is to have a good house, a nice family, some nice children (no more than two), a good car, money, not too many problems, a little house in the country and to enjoy yourself as much as possible. These are the only values we have. And we say that this is all, that this is Christianity.

Among young people today there's a rebellion against this type of thinking which is very interesting. The older generation says that young people think the way they do because they didn't experience the war.

This is the temptation of bread. Our generation has worried only about bread and, in fact, we have nice houses, refrigerators, televisions, etc. But we have become enslaved by all these things and we have not developed other aspects of our personalities. We are empty men, short on personality and sensitivity. This is why movie producers make films for people with the mentality of a twelve-year old, for this is the level of our mentality. We have reduced man to a very low level and very likely have given no ideals to our children. We offer them our lives, our world. What are your desires, son, other than to have a good house like the one your father has, a car and a beautiful wife? And, of course, this does not interest your children at all because they see that your marriage is a failure, that you have never loved, you have never had time to think about whether you love your wife or not. You have lived as though you were under orders, going on with the routine. You have never provided an answer to the problems youth has; you have never been able to philosophize with your children, to dialogue with them (not just about sexual problems, which is fashionable and whoever does so considers himself to be a modern parent), but also about much deeper problems.

We live in a flat world, concerned only about money, while our children go to India where people are dying of hunger without being worried about it at all and they seek in Buddha an answer to the meaning of their lives. This is very sad, that all over the world young people no longer believe in Christianity. Christianity has ceased to be the conscience of humanity. The fashionable religions are Hinduism and Buddhism. When hippies take drugs, it is not simply because they are sunk in vice but because they are looking for something out there, without knowing whether God exists or not. They are seeking the effects of ecstasy, of drugs in order to experience a different reality from the one they see and touch. This is because they see life as too grey, too materialistic. I remember a hippie who used to speak about all this, saying that it is not a matter of enjoying yourself or not.

This is an indication that something is happening. Just as when something is wrong with the blood, pimples appear. This could very well happen to your son and you will have to accept him without being able to do anything about it because you have nothing to offer your son. Your only concerns are going to the football match or being a Milan supporter and you were not even aware that your wife was being unfaithful to you. You have lived a flat life.

(Carmen)

There's a little book called *The Lost Dimension* that studies this situation of today and says that the man of our time has lost the dimension of depth in which faith and religious answers are given. It says this is not, as some preachers say at Mass, because of the beaches and other moralistic things, because the man of our time has not invented any sin that didn't previously exist. The book makes a study of how technological progress has led the man of today into developing a dimension of horizontal progress which does not give him time to enter into his own depth because of the euphoria of progress. It says that, without being aware of it, man has found himself wrapped up in the mechanism of horizontal progress and he is a piece in the production line, in work as in everything else. He is a piece of the machinery.

This book is very useful for this catechesis.

(Kiko)

In Sweden, where people are very much concerned about bread, they have achieved a society where there are neither rich nor poor. They have achieved a type of model justice. Nevertheless, they have discovered that deep down they have achieved nothing because they see the enormous abyss that remains. They find themselves unable to communicate with each other and with many other problems.

Brothers and sisters, in this moment I am John the Baptist in your midst and I have come to tell you: CONVERT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS VERY NEAR YOU! Prepare the way of the Lord because the Savior is coming and with him comes eternal life for you (see Mt 3:1-3). (Here you should really shout, believing it is true, feeling that Jesus Christ really accompanies us with the power to save the poor and give sight to the blind, to make the lame walk and to call men to see their reality.)

Conversion is a word that puts us all in crisis because we don't know what it means. To convert is to put yourself in your true dimension, in the dimension where God has put you, in the one where he has permitted you to find yourself today. To convert means to open your eyes, to wake up from sleep, to enter into truth.

And what is the truth? THAT YOU DIE.⁷ This is the truth: we are people moving towards death. We look for every means

⁷ CCC 1006: "It is in regard to death that man's condition is most shrouded in doubt"

possible to escape this reality. We want to forget the thought of death because it is precisely that which robs us of the meaning of our lives. We have lost the dimension of death in our lives.

There is a documentary called "Violent America" that portrays the large firms in North America that dress up the dead, comb their hair and put make up on them. If someone close to you dies, you dial a phone number and five pretty girls wearing miniskirts arrive. They say to you: Don't worry, no problem. They put some makeup on the corpse so it won't look pale, they clean it up, dress it up, comb its hair and leave it spotless and smiling. You don't have to worry about anything. Nothing has happened. When they're finished they send you the bill and that's it!

There's nothing more anachronistic in our cities than a funeral. It's difficult to follow the hearse because of the traffic and if you get a bit distracted, you find yourself following the Coca-Cola truck...

We have lost the dimension of death in our society by trying to escape our reality. We place hospitals far away and cemeteries, too. The tangible reality of death may still exist in small villages. In Sicily, for example, death is present everywhere and in everything. In almost every house you go into the women are dressed in black because every one of them has some dead relative to mourn. They have pictures of all their dead relatives with flowers in front of them. There, a funeral is an event. But we have lost this today. We have lost our true dimension: that we die.

Don't let anyone think I'm one of those old-fashioned preachers who's going to turn off the lights and start shouting: You're all going to die! in order to terrorize everyone. This is not a matter of frightening anyone but of putting you in front of your reality. Otherwise, when your son or your wife dies, you will not even be aware of it. We live in such alienation that when a loved one dies, it seems like you are dreaming and you are in a trance for several days. You just can't get it into your head. That's because you have never lived in reality. You have always lived fifteen meters off the ground, totally disconnected from who you are as a person. You've never wanted to think that this could happen to you. Maybe it has never even crossed your mind that it could. That your wife and your son could get killed in an accident is impossible. Those things happen to other people, not to you. But when they do happen, it's useless to say no. It is a deep reality.

We have to summon people to wake up from this deep sleep and to take on the full weight of their lives. To take on one's life fully is to take on death. If one of the premises of a problem is false, the answer to the problem will always be false. A man who does not take on life as it is will never live in reality. He will never find the true answer to his life; he

(GS 18). In a sense bodily death is natural, but for faith it is in fact "the wages of sin" (Rom 6:23; see Gen 2:17)...

will always give a false answer. He will never hit the center of his reality.

Sometimes I relate what Carmelo told me about an engineer friend of his who had done many things and who suddenly had cancer and was going to die soon. This man said: This cannot be. They have cheated me. Obviously they had cheated him because they had always told him to study, work hard and make a lot of money because this is what is needed to live well. But now, all of a sudden, he finds himself with cancer, near death. The way he had organized his life was based on false premises because he had not based his life on the premise of death. You never think about the possibility that tomorrow you could have a stroke, that you could die, leaving your wife and children. If you were to think about it, your life would be completely different. If you were to take death into account, the answer to life would be completely different.

Saints have been painted in a cave with a skull in their hands. Why? Because many saints started from that premise. They were men who took on the full weight of their lives. If you take a skull in your hand and you realize it was once a man like you, not a monkey, that he had a nose like yours..., maybe you would take on the full reality of your life and think that you are going to die. Touch the back of your head. You also have a skull that one day will be clean, clean. We always think that it is other people who are going to die, not ourselves. Things happen to other people, not us. We have lost touch with our reality, which is that we are all going to die.

When they took out my kidney, I had a very strong experience. In my hospital room were patients with cancer. There was no way to escape. I knew that when they removed my kidney I would survive but that basically this was only an adjournment and soon my time would come.

To call people to their reality is important. Heidegger said that a real man anticipates death. Why wait until you are at death's door to place yourself in front of this mystery, in front of discovering that your life has had no meaning? Don't be a fool.

There is a parable in the Gospel about this. It tells of a man with a great harvest who said to himself: What am I going to do? I know. I will tear down all my barns and I will build bigger ones. When the work was finished and he had all his wheat stored in the new barns, he said to himself: Eat, drink, enjoy yourself. Fool, says Jesus Christ, for whom have you stored up all this? Tonight you will die (see Lk 12:16-21). By means of this parable Jesus Christ calls all men to reality because life is not assured by the abundance of goods. Why, then, do you worry, seeking happiness in money?⁸

⁸ CCC 2424: ...The disordered desire for money cannot but produce perverse effects. It is one of the causes of the many conflicts which disturb the social order. (see GS 63) ... Every practice that reduces persons to nothing more than a means of profit enslaves man, leads to idolizing money and contributes to the

You search for life and you are called to death. Man does not want to die, but you are going to die.

But physical death comes to your help. It is a privileged moment of total freedom. In front of death, money is of no use, neither are children nor prestige. You are alone. Maybe for the first time in your life the reality of death is calling you to be free, to be alone. Until now you have lived in alienation. You have not been your own person. First you lived the life your parents wanted and now you live the life that others want you to live. Because you have always tried to cut a fine figure, because you cannot bear it if others do not like you. Because you do not want to lose their esteem, you do what others want. You have never been yourself. Maybe now, for the first time in your life, you are free in front of death. There, you have to give a personal answer. For each of us dies alone. You don't go into the coffin with your wife but all by yourself. Even if you have many sons and daughters, even if you have built many factories, even if you have saved lots of money, starting off with nothing, it's as if you had done nothing. You die the same way as the poor drunk in the street. You are alone and death presents you with a bleak landscape about which you know nothing, neither where you are going, nor why you are dying, nor who you are. During the war they used to read out the list of those who were going to be shot the following morning. Just imagine what a night those poor men had: Tomorrow I am going to be killed. And you can do nothing. The next day, shot.

At this point you can ask the people questions. Why did God create you? What for? What is the meaning of your life? What are you living for? Who are you? You will see how the people have no answers. In front of this there is no way of escape.

If no one answers, keep going. I usually ask: In what situation do you find yourself? Why does suffering exist? Do you ever think that you are going to die?

If the catechesis has been done well, people will tell you they don't know. They have become aware that perhaps they have never asked themselves these questions. It is true that you are prophesying to them, for you have told them they are asleep, alienated. And this is true. You are calling them to conversion. You are making them think and ask themselves what is the good of all the things they are so worried about, if they have not resolved the fundamental problem of their lives.

This is today's catechesis: Why do I worry and get upset so much when I have not resolved the fundamental problem? This catechesis really opens people's ears to listen to Jesus Christ.

I conclude by asking the people to be honest with themselves, to be sincere, to pray, to look to the truth of their lives and not to be afraid to find their hands full of sins, of frustration, of rubbish. I am sure of one thing. At all of the catecheses you have many poor people. Not poor in money but people whose lives are destroyed, who have terrible problems.

spread of atheism. "You cannot serve God and Mammon" (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13).

In Italy, there was not one catechesis where there weren't prostitutes, homosexuals, alcoholics, thieves, secularized priests, people with their lives in pieces. People started to tell their problems... *mamma mia!*

The Gospel is fulfilled. Jesus Christ comes for the sick, not for the healthy (see Lk 5:31). And God sends us people whose lives are hell.

The important thing is that the people consider the true weight of their lives.

I finish by calling the people to look at themselves without fear, without running away, because in the deepest and darkest reality of their lives they are going to meet Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is in the deepest reality of man.⁹

There's a midrash, a tale of the Jewish people, that tells of a man who dreamed of becoming rich. He wanted to find a treasure. One night he dreamed there was a treasure hidden under the bridge in his town. When he woke up, he ran to the bridge and he found a policeman watching. He didn't dare approach the bridge until finally the policeman called him and asked him: What are you looking for? Full of fear, he said that he had dreamed there was a treasure under the bridge. The policeman said to him: Well, I dreamed there was a man who was such a fool that he was looking for a treasure outside his own home and all the while he had it under his own kitchen. The man ran home, dug under his kitchen and he found the treasure.

We always look for God outside ourselves. This example tells us something very important. (It's used by the Jews to catechize their children.) It tells us that one day you will meet someone who tells you that there's a treasure in your own home. This someone is the apostle. Jesus Christ said: The kingdom of God is within you (see Lk 17:21). All those who listen to you are seeking this treasure. You are the one who will tell them where to find it.

At the end again invite the people to pray.

(It is better to do the questions at the beginning and then give the catechesis.)

⁹ CCC 359: "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (GS 22). St. Paul tells us that the human race takes its origin from two men: Adam and Christ... The first man, Adam, he says, became a living soul, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. The first Adam was made by the last Adam, from whom he also received his soul, to give him life..." (St. Peter Chrysologus).

SEVENTH DAYTHE KERYGMA (part one)

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The Fall of man (385-421); Sin (1846-1876); man, slave of sin (407, 421, 549, 601, 1733, 1741, 1990, 2057, 2097, 2744); the kerygma: the death of Christ (571-630); the descent into hell and the Resurrection (631-658); at the right hand of the Father (659-682); conqueror of the devil and of death (539, 852, 966); the pouring forth of the Spirit (729-730; 1286-1292); the Holy Spirit and the Church (731-741).

(Kiko)

Today we shall proclaim the kerygma in your midst, the foundation of our faith.

In the previous catecheses we saw that God is present in our history, that he created us so that we may be fulfilled. In other words, life is to be taken seriously, with total sincerity. And yet, the man who wants to be sincere, who looks for the answer to the question of his existence - Who am I? -, clashes against death and suffering, which confronts him as a mystery.

Before proclaiming the announcement of salvation, before announcing the mystery hidden from principalities and powers and yet manifested to us (see 1 Cor 2:6-10), I would like to ask you some questions:

- Who is Jesus Christ for you?
- What does he mean in your life today?
- What, for you, is the fundamental event, the most important fact in the life of Jesus?
- According to you, what did Jesus come to do?
- Concretely, what use is he in your day-to-day life?
- Is he a point of reference for your actions? A moral model? A refuge?
- Wouldn't it seem better to you to have a model who is more human, nearer to us, since, deep down, Jesus is too sublime, too unattainable a model, because basically he cannot be reached, because he is God himself? How can we imitate him if we have a human nature and furthermore, a fallen nature?

I understand how someone can be disturbed by these questions. We are all like that. What we all want is to give the right answer. But it is not a matter of that. This dialogue, like those in the previous catecheses, is meant to prepare the ground, to make people reflect, to open their ears. It's not a question of giving a theological synthesis that speaks to reason (even if that will also be done), but of listening to an announcement of salvation.

What we are doing in your midst is to announce good news, news of an event which occurred historically, which comes to you across the centuries, which is being made present through this preaching and which brings with it, for the one listening to it and welcoming it, a transformation of his existence.

For that reason, I tell you something very important. What is asked of you in this catechesis is something minimal: not to just sit here and that is it, but to listen because faith comes through listening (see Rm 10:14-17). If I invite you to listen, it is because it is not as easy as you think. Many of you here are not listening to anything at all. Some are coming out of curiosity to see what these catechists are talking about. Others come with an attitude of rejection, of criticism to compare what we say with what they already know, or to use the catecheses, that is, to learn to take advantage of whatever new things the other may say to us. It is difficult to be able to listen. To be able to listen one needs to be poor, humble, to accept that the other may say something that is really important for us.

Today we will speak about Jesus Christ, the center of Christianity; we will proclaim the Good News.

Christianity is not a religion, in the sense of the natural religions. We saw this already in the catechesis on desacralization.

Christianity is not a philosophy. It is not only a doctrine that explains the fundamental whys of life in a rationalistic way. To be Christian is not to adhere to a series of abstract and pre-established truths. Christianity is not a treatise.

Christianity is not a moralism. Jesus Christ is not at all an ideal of life to be accomplished through your efforts. Jesus Christ did not come only to give us an example and to teach us to fulfill the law. God revealed his will to men, giving the law, with the ten commandments, on Mount Sinai. No one has ever been able to fulfill this law completely. As St. John, the Apostle, says: "If we say we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar" (see 1 John 1:8-10).

So if no one has been able to fulfill the law of Moses without sinning, thereby justifying himself through it, how can we think that Jesus Christ may have come to give us a law that is even more difficult? (Moses squared, as some Protestants say.) If the law was difficult and no one has fulfilled it and thus the law has demonstrated to all of us that we are sinners, how can we fulfill the Sermon on the Mount, which is far more difficult?

For Jesus Christ says: "You have heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery' (to commit adultery one has to go to bed with a married woman other than your wife) but I say to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (see Mt 5:27). Jesus Christ brings the law to a much more difficult level than before. He also says: "You have heard it said, 'You shall not kill' (to be a murderer one had to kill someone physically) but I say to you: if a man calls his brother 'fool,' he is already guilty of

murder" (see Mt 5:21-22). A murderer is now someone who hates his brother (see 1 Jn 3:15).

How can we understand such a thing? If we were not able to fulfill the law of Moses, how can we think that Jesus Christ may have come to give us a new law in the Sermon on the Mount, even more difficult to fulfill?

Many people think Jesus Christ came only to give us a more perfect law than the earlier one and, with his life and his death (especially his sufferings) to give us an example so that we can do the same. For these people, Jesus Christ is only an ideal, a model of life, an example. This is not the case. This would mean to transform Christianity into a moralism in the justification of the person through the fulfillment of the new law. A lot of people think this way: they believe that Jesus Christ came only to give us an example with his life, saying: You see how I do it? Well, you do the same.

And if you ask these people: do you do it?, they answer you: Get out of here. I'm not Jesus Christ! I'm not a saint...

Christianity is not at all a moralism. For if Jesus Christ had come only to give us an ideal for living, how could he have given us such a high ideal, so high, that no one can achieve it?

Christianity is not a moralism, nor a religion nor a philosophy. CHRISTIANITY IS FUNDAMENTALLY GOOD NEWS. IT IS AN EVENT.

For you to see a bit what news really is, I'll give you an example.

The Persians are invading Greece and the army of Athens has gone out to stop them. Forty kilometers from Athens, at Marathon, they battle. Imagine the anxiety of this city whose fate depends on this battle. If the Persians win, they will enter the city, the men will be put to the sword, the children crushed against the stones, the women raped. The city is living in terror that this may happen if the Athenians lose the battle. A soldier left the battle field and running for forty kilometers, reached the city gates and gave this news: We have won! Then he falls down dead from exhaustion.

This man gave his life to bring this news because it was of enormous interest to the city; the salvation of the city depended on it. It was the victory itself that the soldier brought with the news. Through the words of the soldier, salvation arrived for all in such a way that listening to the news the city that had been drowning in anguish and panic, bursts out in joy, happiness and feasting. This is why Scripture says: How beautiful are the feet of those who announce peace (see Rm 10:15, Is 52:5).

So that you may see how fundamental good news is and how it is not a matter of giving good advice, because everyone knows what he has to do, I'll give you another example.

When France was occupied by the Germans during World War II and everyone was waiting for the Allies to land, one morning in a village in Normandy, a woman went from door to door saying: They've landed! This news touched the people and changed their lives. Everyone knew what he had to do: either to run away

quickly because he had collaborated with the Nazis, or to go meet the Allies who represented freedom and the end of oppression.

Christianity is by no means just a doctrine we learn from catechisms and theologies. Christianity is Good News, an historical event and that makes it different from all religions and philosophies. There are witnesses to this historical event who are involved in it: the apostles.

These examples are meant to show what Good News is, what Christianity is; news that doesn't even depend on what kind of person is bringing it. Like that woman going from door to door bringing the news of the landing who could even have been the village prostitute.

Every news is what it is because it arrives at a particular situation for those who receive it. It is news because it interests the one who listens to it, who is in a concrete existential situation which changes radically just by listening to this news. The two examples we have given illustrate this fact clearly.

Also Christianity is fundamentally Good News, an historical event that breaks into our existence and into our existential situation, changing it radically. It is the news that will completely change the life of the one who welcomes it. It is the news all men are waiting for.

Why is this news that Christianity brings so important? What is the situation of man that makes this news so interesting to him? Let's see, step by step.

The *Letter to the Hebrews* (Heb 2:14-15) says: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself (Jesus Christ) likewise partook of the same nature, THAT THROUGH DEATH HE MIGHT DESTROY HIM WHO HAS THE POWER OF DEATH, THAT IS THE DEVIL and DELIVER ALL THOSE WHO THROUGH FEAR OF DEATH WERE SUBJECT TO LIFELONG SLAVERY."¹

Here Scripture says there is only one problem for man: He is kept enslaved by the lord of death, the devil. Man is enslaved by the devil through the fear he has of death. This fear lasts all his life.

Man is encircled, held in slavery by the fear of death. It says that Jesus Christ came to take man out of this situation, destroying and overcoming death.²

¹ CCC 635: Christ went down into the depths of death so that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (Jn 5:25; see Mt 12:24; Rom 10:7; Eph 4:9). Jesus, "the Author of life," by dying destroyed "him who has the power of death, that is, the devil and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb 2:14-15). Henceforth the risen Christ holds "the keys of Death and Hades," so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:10).

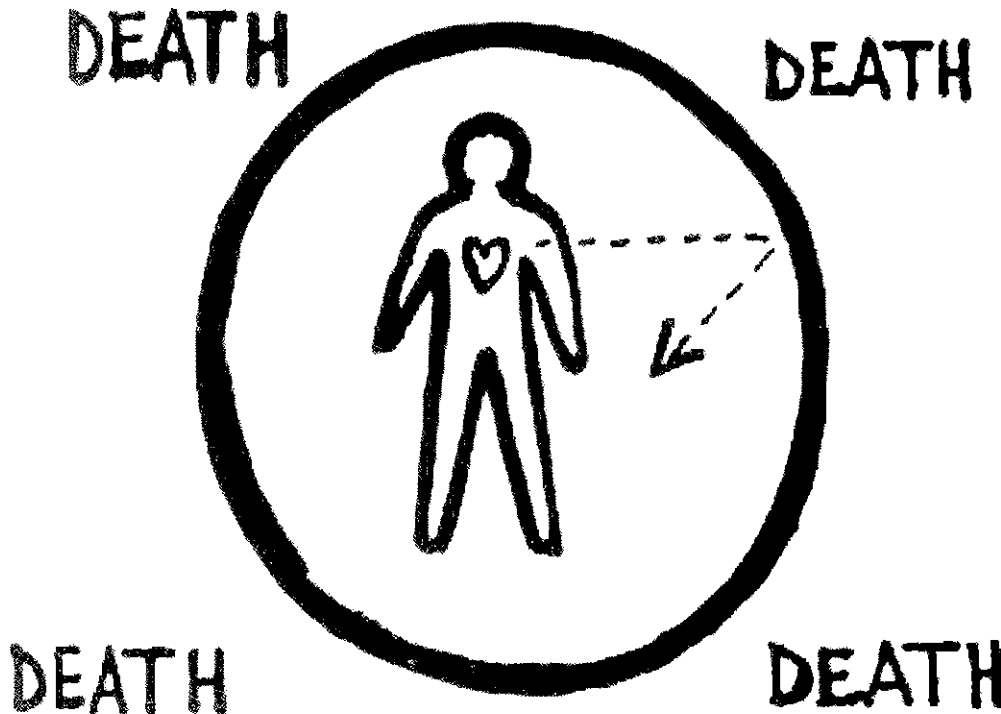
² CCC 407: The doctrine of original sin, closely connected with that of redemption by Christ, provides lucid discernment of man's situation and activity in the world. By our first parents'

Your problem is that you fear death and this is what makes you suffer. This is the root of all your unhappiness and discontent.

But, people will say: Me, afraid of death? Not at all! This is what enslaves me and makes me suffer? What nonsense!

We are not speaking only of physical death.

What makes you suffer is everything that destroys you, everything that kills you: your wife's defects, or of your



husband, the person at work who annoys you, an illness you have, that you have been fired, that things in your home are not done the way you want them done, that you don't earn enough money, that your boss is a rascal... WHAT MAKES YOU SUFFER IS EVERYTHING THAT IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER THREATENS YOUR PERSONALITY, EVERYTHING THAT GOES AGAINST YOUR EXISTENTIAL REALITY OF LIFE AND THAT SOMEHOW DESTROYS YOU AND KILLS YOU. Therefore, you cannot accept the defects of your wife because they kill you, or certain attitudes of others that destroy you and you cannot accept this. Everything that goes against your concept of truth, against your ideas, destroys and kills you. Everything kills you: your character, sex, anything against your body, against your ideals, your plans, your idea of what is

sin, the devil has acquired a certain domination over man, even though man remains free. Original sin entails "captivity under the power of him who thenceforth had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Council of Trent (1546): DS 1511; see Heb 2:14). Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action (see John Paul II, CA 25) and morals.

good, your hopes and dreams. You simply cannot tolerate whatever it is that goes against you, so you suffer.

Man is a slave because he doesn't want to die, because he is afraid of death. I am speaking of ontological death, the death of the being, the death of your self.

Because of this reality of death that you have, because the only life you have is what you have today, you are a slave of evil: you are a slave of the devil and you obey his concupiscences and his commands. This creates in you a dissatisfied man, you are a man in a state of suffering.

You have engraved within you the natural law. You know that you will find fulfillment loving the other, transcending yourself in the other, . In the moment your "I" transcends itself in the other, whoever this is: your colleague, the poor man on the street corner, your wife or your child... in the measure you are able to transcend yourself in the other, loving him, you fulfill yourself, you fulfill the law. All the law and the prophets are summed up in this: love God and love your neighbor as yourself (see Mt 22:36-40). But, every day, man experiences this reality: he cannot pass over to the other, he cannot cross the barrier that divides him from the other because between him and the other is a monster, a dragon: death. Because of this, man is dissatisfied. On the one hand, he knows he can fulfill himself in loving, passing to the other; on the other hand, he finds himself unable to do it. When he tries, he finds the dragon in the middle, he finds death and he is afraid of death.

Death has become a monster and we all have a terror of death. (I am speaking not only of physical death, but of all kinds of death in general. There is only one death, the death of being: that is you die, your person in some way ceases to exist, to be. My life, my history, is nothing but smoke, of no use for anything, because man dies and disappears.)

Man lives terrorized by this reality. He tries to be. He tries to live what is real, what is true, what won't perish, what stands firm, what is authentic. (For this reason the sea is a symbol of death. It is mobile and sinuous and the opposite of what man seeks: what is real; that is, what does not move, the rock, what is sure, what does not perish, what is eternal.) Time leads to death and man cannot bear this.

But why does man live in this slavery? How is it possible that man has arrived at this situation? How is it that people have arrived at this situation of never being satisfied with anything, of being unhappy? Why is man not satisfied with this kind of flat happiness that society proposes: car, wife, house, bringing up the children and that's all? Why is man not happy even though he has a wonderful house, a fantastic wife, marvelous children? Because man finds himself in the situation described by St. Paul in the Letter to the Romans: he experiences that on the one hand his reason tells him to do what is good and on the other hand that he is unable to do it. Why is it that although I know what is good, I cannot do it? (see Rm 7:15-24).

For it is a fact that man cannot accomplish what is good. People are scandalized at this because of a deep sense of

moralism within all of us. When people see a poor man they think he is a rascal, because if he wanted to work he wouldn't be dying of hunger. The fact is that he drinks. Man thinks that everything is up to him, that you can conquer it all with your fists. If someone is poor, it's because he doesn't want to work; he prefers to mooch off others. We are all so catechized in this sense that we think that what is good is within reach. For this reason we are scandalized when we discover that good is not within our reach. We live in a pelagianism, in a compete pharisaism, thinking that everything is our work.

The reality of man is this: he wants to do good but he cannot. Marxism says he cannot because he is alienated by the unjust social structures; psychology says he cannot because of his psychological complexes. All this is superficial. Christianity, going to the root of this situation of man, says something else. God has revealed the reality of man in this way: MAN CANNOT DO GOOD BECAUSE HE HAS SEPARATED HIMSELF FROM GOD BY SINNING AND HAS REMAINED IMPOTENT AND DISABLED AT THE MERCY OF DEVILS. HE HAS ENDED UP ENSLAVED BY THE DEVIL. THE DEVIL IS HIS LORD.

For this reason advice or demanding sermons are of no use. Man cannot do supernatural good. Tomorrow you will confront this reality: an interior dichotomy: You want to but you can't. Everything is going well but the moment you are confronted with an event of death, you rebel, you can't make it, you sink and serve the devil. You are not able to walk on death, you cannot cross the barrier, because you are a slave of the devil who manipulates you as he wishes because he is much more powerful than you are. You cannot fulfill the law, because the law tells you to love, not to resist evil, but you cannot do it. You do whatever the devil wants you to do.

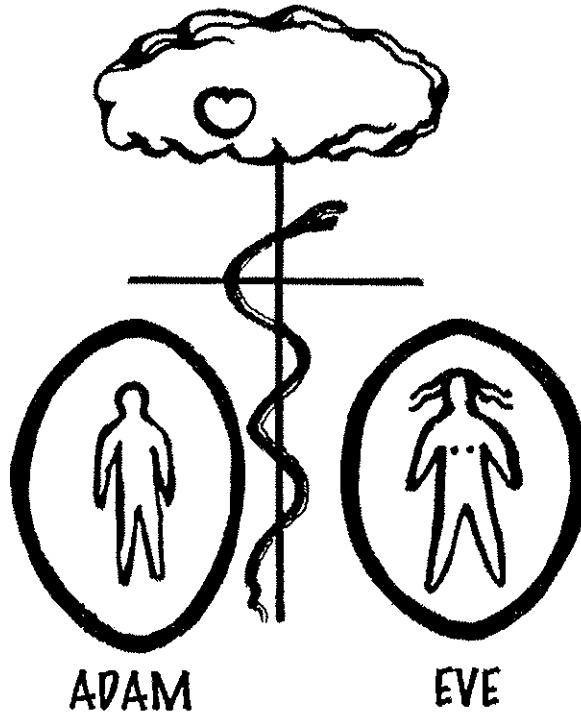
Why does this happen? Let us see in the story of Genesis (Gen 3).³

God does not abandon us. He gives us a Word that explains our reality, that tells us the whys of ... This Word is Adam and Eve in Genesis. (People think this is a rather odd little tale you need to know as a bit of culture, but nothing more; it is sacred history... People think that it's something that happened to the first man, but that our problems are more serious. It's not at all like that. This is a Word of God that explains our reality. It is a Word of God for us now.)

Genesis says: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?"' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, "You shall not

³ CCC 390 The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man (Cf. GS 13). Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents (Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1513; Pius XII: DS 3897; Paul VI: AAS 58 [1966], 654).

eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband and he ate."



The first thing we notice in this text (which is revelation) is that the serpent says to the woman (Adam and Eve are you)⁴: How is it that you cannot eat of any of the trees in the garden? Why does the serpent say this? In reality, God allowed Adam and Eve to eat from all of the trees in the garden except the one in the middle. Why, then, does the serpent say: How is it you cannot eat from any of the trees of the garden? It seems a stupid mistake on the part of the devil. But the devil's intention is very clear. God has told them not to eat from only one tree. But the serpent lets this thought fall into their

⁴ CCC 402 All men are implicated in Adam's sin, as St. Paul affirms: "By one man's disobedience many (that is, all men) were made sinners": "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin and so death spread to all men because all men sinned..." (Rom 5:12, 19). The Apostle contrasts the universality of sin and death with the universality of salvation in Christ. "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom 5:18).

subconscious: if I can't eat from one tree, it is as if I can't eat from any; I am a limited being.

St. Paul says: taking advantage of the law the devil seduced and killed us (see Rm 7:13).⁵ Taking occasion from the precept, of the prohibition, of the law. Let's see. You find yourself in front of the tree that, according to you, is good (pleasing to the eye and desirable) and moreover, you are convinced that you can fulfill yourself as a person by eating its fruit (seeing that it was good for acquiring wisdom). You find yourself in front of the tree and the first thing you think is: Why can't I do this? Why can't I go with Betty if we love each other... She's married, but she doesn't love her husband, She is an unhappy woman.... Why has God put this love for her in me if I can't? And you think: if this is what I desire, if this is where I can be fulfilled, why can't I do it? Who says it's a sin? Priests? But in other countries they say it's allowed.

The devil plants a suspicion in our heart: if you cannot eat from that tree, basically you cannot do anything. He left that idea in our subconscious. He has convinced us that we are not free, that we are limited beings.

But the woman replies at once: No, no. We may eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden except the one in the middle. Immediately, the serpent, the father of lies, liar from the beginning, poisonous, as Jesus Christ says (see Jn 8:44), tells the biggest lie of all, the primordial lie: it is not true that you will die, for God knows well that the day you eat of this tree you will be like God. The lie is perfect. It seems to people that the tree is good and that by eating from it they will fulfill themselves, find life. God is jealous of you - says the serpent - he doesn't want you to fulfill yourself, he doesn't want you to know good and evil and to be as great as he is. That's why God has forbidden you to eat of the tree - says the devil. This is the primordial lie.

The serpent is saying that God has not put the natural law there in the heart of man, because he loves man, but because God is the contrary of love. God wants to limit you. God does not want you to be fulfilled. This is the terrible lie: God is not love. God does not exist.⁶ Fulfill yourself as you will, as you like, with your reason, with your instincts. Good heavens! You are a God!⁷ Why do you have to put limits on yourself? Away with this God, here, there and everywhere.

⁵ CCC 391 Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy (Cf. Gen 3:1-5; Wis 2:24). Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil" (Cf. Jn 8:44; Rev 12:9).

⁶ CCC 397 Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of (Cf. Gen 3:1-11; Rom 5:19.). All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.

⁷ 398 In that sin man preferred himself to God and by that very act scorned him. He chose himself over and against God, against

This is the catechesis of the devil: God does not love you.

And he convinces Eve. Eve believes that this is true: the fruit is desirable. You think the same thing. You are convinced that you will fulfill yourself this way. And Eve eats.

To eat is to accept the catechesis of the devil that God is not love. This is not something you think about. You just do it. Eve, you and I, make a "sacrament" when we sin. We make an historical act through which we say "Amen" to the catechesis of the devil: that God does not love us. To eat is the sign that we accept this.

But sin generates death. When Eve made the "sacrament," "the liturgy of the devil," when she sinned, she became convinced: it is true that God does not exist, that I am alone in the world. What happens then? The death of the being happens. Since man exists insofar as God gives him being, and God gives him being by loving him, because God is love; if we accept that God is not love, if with a sacrament, sin, we deny not at an intellectual level, but at a profound, existential one that God loves us, from where does our being come? By sinning we deny that the foundation of our being, that life, comes from God. As far as it is in our power to do so we separate ourselves from God. Then our life ceases to have meaning. Then I think: who has created me? Because the deep reason of life has disappeared. I DIE ONTOLOGICALLY, in a manner of speaking; I become completely blind. If God does not exist for me, because he doesn't love me, who gives me being? Who am I?⁸

Thus man experiences at a deep level (this is not experienced through reason) that the world falls on top of him. He feels life lacks meaning. He feels divided from the others. He no longer knows who he is or who the other is, everything is licit and nothing is licit, because nothing has meaning. HE HAS KNOWN DEATH IN THE ACT OF SINNING. Because before this, death as such did not exist. Physical death was a natural passage, as everything in nature dies and resurrects.

But let us continue with Genesis: "Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked." The feeling of

the requirements of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good. Created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully "divinized" by God in glory. Seduced by the devil, he wanted to "be like God," but "without God, before God and not in accordance with God" (St. Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua; see Gen 3:5).

⁸ On the consequences for humanity of the sin of Adam, see CCC 402-409.

CCC 405: Original sin... is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death and inclined to sin -- an inclination to evil that is called "concupiscence." Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back toward God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.

nakedness is the feeling of death: to know evil, which is the absence of God. If God is life, the non-God, evil, is death. They experience death that they did not know before. And look at what happens from that moment on: "And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid (the word "fear" appears in the Scriptures) because I was naked; and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked?' (Who has catechized you, who has made you know death? Who has made you know evil?) 'Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman who you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.'" (Selfishness appears. To save himself, Adam does not hesitate to put the blame on Eve: kill her, if you want.)" This is what we all do: No one wants to take on the sin of the other. Let him die and I'll save myself as I can.

Adam and Eve are us. What happens to us by sinning? WE EXPERIENCE ONTIC DEATH, that is, at a deep existential level, ONTOLOGICAL DEATH, that is, the death of the being, THE ABSENCE OF GOD WITHIN US AND SO THE LOSS OF THE MEANING OF LIFE. This is the true death. Physical death and suffering are nothing compared with the death that is experienced through the separation from God in sinning. Then, infinite terror is felt, you completely lose your true dimension. This is death.

From the moment that man sinned he has remained radically unable to live.⁹ He is dead. The seed of death has been inserted within him. This seed of death is the strongest thing he has and it is what governs his life. This man can do whatever he likes but he ends up in the cemetery. Sin puts a poison inside us that leaves us weakened. Sin lives in us as a seed of death.

Now we understand St. Paul in the letter to the Romans: "I do not understand my own actions; I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate... it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." St. Paul calls "sin" the devil, the action of the devil within us.

Sin lives in us, reigns in us, as something that keeps us enslaved and without our wanting to, brings us to sin. We are at the mercy of our concupiscences. It is enough to lack something or that something is prohibited, for us to want to do it. Why? Because the man who has experienced death now does not want to die. He has experienced the not-being and he wants to be. He is afraid to die. He is afraid of death. Not to be, is not to be loved. To live means to be loved. So we seek to be loved in everything: with money, with prestige, with a beautiful woman.

⁹ CCC 399: Scripture portrays the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness (Rom 3:23). They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image -- that of a God jealous of his prerogatives (Gen 3:5-10).

Man wants to be loved. He wants to be esteemed. Because this means to live.

So we can understand St. Paul: "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rm 7:14-25). St. Paul is not speaking of "body" in the Hellenistic sense of body and soul. For St. Paul the body is the flesh, it is this existence the way it is, disastrous, which cannot satisfy us. It is the man forced to experience his own reality: his sin. It's useless.

So we do everything possible to win the esteem of others, to be respected and loved. MAN BECOMES THE SLAVE OF EVIL. HE BECOMES AN IDOLATER. This man is ready to sell his soul to the devil to succeed in being. He wants life and he seeks life in thousands of things: money, fame, fun, etc. Because of this, Jesus Christ says in the Gospel: Your sin is that, because you want to live, you believe that life is ensured by the abundance of goods (see Lk 12:15).

Man, who by sinning has experienced death, does not want to die; he cannot stand anything in life that brings him to death, he cannot accept it. He escapes from everything that destroys him and makes him suffer.

Work which before sin, was a creation for man, now becomes a slavery. Before, a married woman accepted that her husband would head the household; now, says Genesis, she will not bear to be dominated by man. Before to have children seemed wonderful to her because pain had a meaning within the context of life; now, it becomes a nightmare. Because before, physical pain existed but had a meaning; now, it is an image of death and it is unbearable. For pain without meaning is a monstrosity; pain as a symbol of the destruction of the being, which is already experienced interiorly through sin, is unbearable.

MAN BECAUSE OF SIN, IS LEFT ENCIRCLED BY THE FEAR OF DEATH AND CANNOT PASS TO THE OTHER. HE CANNOT LOVE. The law tells us we fulfill ourselves in loving the other, passing to the other. But we are encircled by the fear of death and cannot love anyone, because in passing to the other we are confronted with the barrier of death that threatens us. The other destroys us, kills us and we cannot love him, because we do not want to die.

This fact produces in man a very deep interior dichotomy that is the root of all our unhappiness. To know that our fulfillment is in the law and to experience the inability to fulfill it by loving the others. We are rendered incapable of doing what we know to be our fulfillment by sin and the fear of death. We think: how can we let others steal from us if without

money, we die? How can I love my wife or my children if their defects destroy me? How can I take on the sin of another person if this kills me?

If I let them do it, they crucify me and I don't want to die because I'm afraid of death.

Because of the fear of death we are slaves of evil and of sin and we do the will of the devil. St. Paul says: "Sin is the sting of death" (see 1 Cor 15:56).

THIS IS WHAT MAKES US SUFFER: THE FEAR WE HAVE OF DEATH. And, to escape from death, we fall victim to the devil, we become idolaters, looking for life.

When a man gets married, he is looking for life in marriage; he makes an idol of marriage. When he works, he is looking for happiness in his work. He makes money, looking for happiness in it. He looks for happiness in sex, alcohol, in anything. And most of all, he looks for life in the esteem of others. Here we see clearly that moralisms are no good, it is useless to demand things from anyone. If we don't go to the source of all adultery and of robberies, which is the heart of man, we are wasting time. Destroy in man this circle of death that enslaves him, change his heart and you will see how he shares his money and stops being unjust in society.

It is no use telling people that one must love. No one can love the other. You can get close to and love your wife and someone else but only up to a certain point, just so long as they may not destroy you. But you are not able to go beyond this, because you must defend your life because it is the only thing you have because you want to live, to be. How can you lose your life? Why? For whom? A man will give his life for something that builds him up in the esteem of others, or for something noble, his native land or some ideal... (see Rm 5:7). But who will give his life for nothing? Who will give his life for the enemy? (Your enemy is everything that threatens your personality.) But come on! On the contrary: one must kill the enemy because he goes against what you think is good. Who wastes his life for nothing? It's absurd!

And whose fault is all this? No one's. This is why speeches are of no use. It is useless to say: "Sacrifice yourself, be nice to each other, love each other." If someone tries to do so, he'll become the greatest Pharisee, because he will do everything for his own personal perfection and will judge others.

This is why all human relationships are based on violence, the violence of one who forces the other to fulfill the law and vice versa. Not only that, but everyone has his own idea of the law. If a husband is a jealous man... Poor wife! And if she's a little bit neurotic... poor husband, he will have to sweat it out.

Relationships in marriage are very often conflictive. I use marriage as a paradigm because it's the same everywhere. This is so true that marriage in Sweden, for example, as an institution no longer exists. The family community as the foundation of the social order doesn't exist. And divorce is spreading throughout all of Europe. This has become a reality because nothing else is

possible. Since all the husband is interested in is being loved and the wife too, the war is already there. What can be done about it? Nothing! Put up with each other, resist until you can't take it anymore and then separate and it's all over. The couple divorces and see you later.

This is why many marriages are a failure. The most you can achieve is coexistence. The ruling law in marriage is good manners. They are so polite with each other they don't even talk to one another. They come to a compromise: you have the right to your freedom and I to mine. I have my idiosyncrasies and my egocentricities; you have yours. We are civilized people: I will put up with some of your manias and you with mine. The important thing is not to disturb each other.

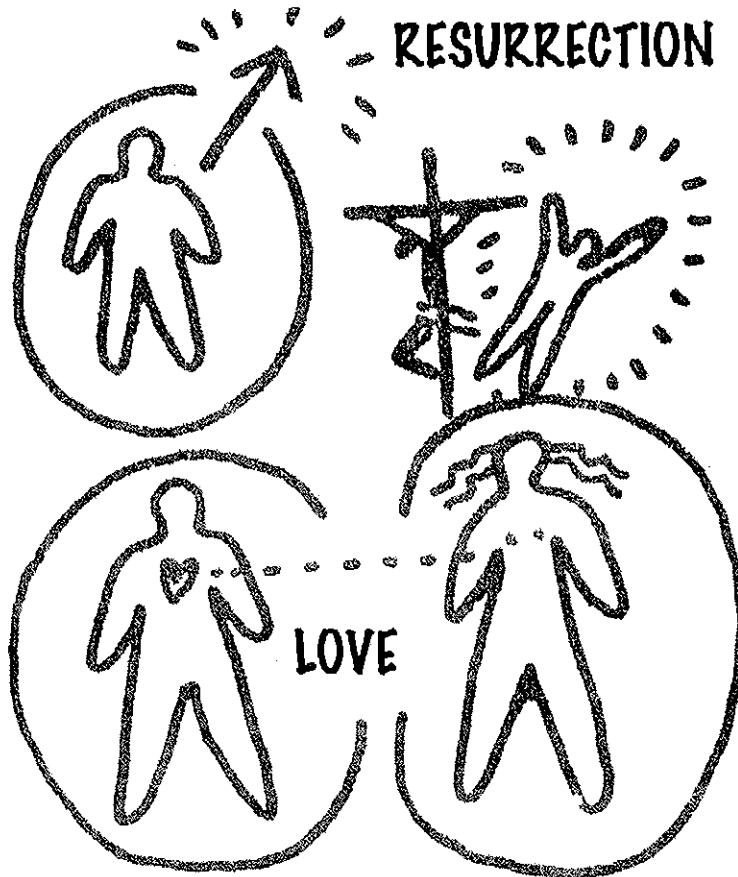
The ideal of happiness in modern society has flattened: to have a nice home, a great car, to go out on Saturdays and Sundays, to be honest, perhaps to go to Mass, to work, to be the friend of a priest, etc. The happiness of man ends here. But what happens? No one is satisfied because God has not created man for such a flat happiness, even if many psychological theories and Marxism try to convince us there is nothing else. We have reduced man, we have diminished him. This is not the plan God made for man. This is why man is not satisfied with such a petty happiness; his longing for happiness is much greater; his problems are much deeper than not having money, a television, a refrigerator or a car.

The tragedy of man is that every day he experiences his own reality of sin and selfishness because he is not able to cross the barrier of death, because he experiences a deep interior dichotomy and so he escapes and alienates himself. Our society is a society of alienated men because man cannot stand this unhappiness. There are many kinds of alienation. One is that of the worker. He doesn't have much time to think about these things because all day long he is earning his bread swinging the pick by working like mad (even if he has the same problems with his wife; only that he solves things more quickly, maybe even by beating her...). He alienates himself with his betting, his little card games, by drinking with his friends in a bar because man, whatever his situation may be, needs to escape from this reality, from this dichotomy, from this profound reality of unhappiness. This is why he gets up, has breakfast, works, has lunch, returns to work, watches television, has dinner and goes to bed. On Sundays he goes to a ball game and then watches the final scores on television to check them against his cards. Man tries not to think until one day something extraordinary happens and the world falls on top of him.

Now we can understand what moralism is. It is to demand from man to overcome sin with his own strength, without Jesus Christ.

Then we say to him: try, make sacrifices, make an effort! And we bombard people. The most we achieve is to terrorize them, because one looks at himself and realizes he is lazy, that it's an effort even to go to church on Sunday and he's sad that he is not able to change. The most he will try to do is some little thing to gain heaven in the next life, he will do a little bit

of "commerce," He can't do anything more because he is deeply tainted. He is carnal. He cannot do any better than argue, be jealous, be envious, etc. He cannot do anything else and it is not his fault. Let us not become fascists who think that every man is what he wants to be.



WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS?

JESUS CHRIST HAS BROKEN THIS CIRCLE OF DEATH AND SIN THAT ENSLAVES US. HE HAS OVERCOME THE LORD OF DEATH SO THAT WE CAN CROSS THE BARRIER THAT SEPARATES US FROM THE OTHER AND CAN LOVE HIM. DEATH HAS BEEN OVERCOME BY THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST. NOW WE CAN LOVE EACH OTHER IN A NEW DIMENSION.

This is why the only sign that announces the risen Jesus Christ victorious over death is the Church. "Love one another just as I have loved you. By this love they will know that you are my disciples" because the only guarantee the world has that death has been overcome is love in the dimension of the cross.

Because no man is able to love in this way: no one is able to let himself be killed by the enemy, unless he does it as a tactic because he is afraid because he is a coward. Who is able to let himself be killed by the enemy, loving him, who is able to let himself be destroyed by his wife, to let himself be crucified by the defects of his companion? On the contrary, we have to teach every one a lesson and to judge everybody!

The Just One, the only one who could judge, has refused to judge man. He did not even judge the murderer and the robber.

So you can understand St. Peter when he says: You must obey not only just masters but also the unjust ones (see 1 Pt 2:18). Jesus Christ did not return a blow for a blow, an insult for an insult. He left all justice to the Father. But not in order to say: now he will come again and punish everyone. To think that way is to not understand Jesus Christ at all.

There are some psalms in the Scriptures called Psalms of Malediction that say: destroy our enemies, take the babies of our enemies and dash them against the stones (Ps 136). This scandalizes us and we say: how terrible! There are readings that appeal to God's vengeance against the enemies of the people. Do you know the song of the wine presser? The words are taken from Isaiah 63. It speaks of one dressed in red coming from Edom. (The people of Edom are the enemies of Israel). He is asked: Why are you advancing dyed in red? He looks like a winepresser, like someone who has trodden the grapes in the winepress. Why are you like this? He replies: I have trodden the winepress alone. Of my people no one was with me. I looked and there was no one to help me. The day of vengeance had arrived; I trampled the peoples in my fury.

Do you know what this means? All the enemies of the people of God have been trodden underfoot. Do you know who were the enemies of the people of Israel? You and I. Have you been trodden on? I haven't. Do you know who has been trodden on? The one who was trodden on was Jesus. In your place and in my place. The enemies of the people of Israel, of the people of God, all of them, have been put in the winepress and trampled upon. But He loved the enemies so much that he said: no one will enter; I will enter alone.

We are very ignorant about Scripture and, as a result, we have ideas of a mushy God, with a pointy beard, with plucked eyebrows, with a hand like this and a look like that... (like some pictures of the Sacred Heart). We think Jesus was all sweetness. And we don't know that Jesus said: Scoundrels! You brood of vipers! And he called Herod: That fox! Jesus Christ got angry too. But since our image of God is the one on the holy cards, we are unable to understand the God of the Bible, a powerful and firm God.

WHAT IS SALVATION FOR MAN? THAT DEATH, THE BARRIERS IN HIS HEART CAN BE DESTROYED. This has been accomplished in the DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.¹⁰

¹⁰ CCC 654: The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life. This new life is above all *justification* that reinstates us in God's grace, "so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4; see 4:25). Justification consists in both victory over the death caused by sin and a new participation in grace (Cf. Eph 2:4-5; 1 Pt 1:3). It brings about filial adoption so that men become Christ's brethren, as Jesus himself called his disciples after his

Jesus Christ came to tell us the opposite of what the serpent told us. The serpent convinces us that God is not love. He comes to tell us that God is love, not with words, but doing it and fulfilling. The law was the means the serpent used to convince us that God was jealous of us and did not love us. Jesus Christ resurrects us from the law because in him it is given to us fulfilled and free of charge so that the law may never again be a stumbling block for us. Now, the manifestation of God is not a sublime law you have to fulfill, justification comes from fulfilling it. Now there is a new theophany: this is why Jesus appears in the Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah. GOD MADE THE MOST COMPLETE MANIFESTATION IN JESUS CHRIST, WHOM HE HAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD and WHOM HE HAS ESTABLISHED AS OUR LORD, AS OUR KYRIOS. JESUS CHRIST IS THE LORD OF SINAI, THE TRUTH.¹¹

But if he is the truth, if the truth is love for the enemy, the mercy that was manifested in him, there is no law other than mercy. BECAUSE IN JESUS CHRIST DEATH HAS BEEN OVERCOME, we can let ourselves be killed by the other, we can fulfill the Law, we are like sheep led to the slaughter every day. As St. Paul says: "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are treated as sheep to be slaughtered" (see Rm 8:36). Before this man could not enter into death, because death was a monster, the Leviathan. Now we can enter, calling on the Name of Jesus Christ, because GOD HAS RAISED JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD AND HAS CONSTITUTED HIM OUR SAVIOUR, OUR LORD. HE HAS GIVEN HIM THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT. HE HAS GIVEN HIM THE POWER TO BEGET US FROM GOD, TO GIVE US A NEW LIFE, TO RAISE US, TO GIVE US ETERNAL LIFE.

The wage of sin is death. He has been handed over for our sins so that we do not die. GOD RAISED HIM UP TO ANNOUNCE TO US

Resurrection: "Go and tell my brethren" (Mt 28:10; Jn 20:17). We are brethren not by nature, but by the gift of grace, because that adoptive filiation gains us a real share in the life of the only Son, which was fully revealed in his Resurrection.

CCC 655 Finally, Christ's Resurrection -- and the risen Christ himself -- is the principle and source of our future resurrection: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep... For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20-22). The risen Christ lives in the hearts of his faithful while they await that fulfillment. In Christ, Christians "have tasted... the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:5) and their lives are swept up by Christ into the heart of divine life, so that they may "live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15; see Col 3:1-3).

¹¹ CCC 449 By attributing to Jesus the divine title "Lord," the first confessions of the Church's faith affirm from the beginning that the power, honor and glory due to God the Father are due also to Jesus, because "he was in the form of God" (Cf. Acts 2:34-36; Rom 9:5; Titus 2:13; Rev 5:13; Phil 2:6) and the Father manifested the sovereignty of Jesus by raising him from the dead and exalting him into his glory (Cf. Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:9-11).

THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS. THIS IS WHY THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS ANNOUNCED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST. St. Paul says: He was handed over for our sins and raised for our justification (Rm 4:25). What justifies us is not only the death but above all the resurrection (see Rm 5:10). If Jesus Christ is not living now, able to enter within you and love you deeply, to tear out from you the serpent of hatred towards your husband which stops you from speaking to him and to give you peace, who will tell you your sins are forgiven? Because I say so? No! The apostles experienced that Jesus is Kyrios, Lord, only when Jesus Christ lived in them. BECAUSE GOD, St. Paul tells us, THROUGH HIS RESURRECTION HAS CONSTITUTED JESUS CHRIST LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT (see 1 Cor 15:45).

Adam is the first man, paradigm of this man of the flesh, enslaved by the power of sin; he is the living man. Jesus Christ is the second man, the first of a new creation. HE IS LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT. He can live in you and me because the new man is one with God. God loves humanity so much that he makes us his sons. HE CAN LIVE IN US. This new man, this new dimension that man receives in Christ, cannot be seen, cannot be made visible other than in one reality: THE CHURCH. For the new man is communion of hearts. If you are in Christ, if you have been raised with Christ, you also can give life to men because you can transmit the Spirit to them. You can announce to them the Good News of which you are a witness. Then you can live in the heart of everyone because the troubles of the world are no longer troublesome, for you love men as God loves them. You live in Christ and so you are one with humanity.

This, brothers and sisters, is Christianity. If a man is truly born from Christ, he loves men to the point of being able to give his life for them.

When St. Peter, coming out of the Cenacle, announces the Good News for the first time, the people who listened asked him: What do we have to do? He replied: CONVERT AND BE BAPTIZED, INVOKING THE NAME OF JESUS and you will receive the Holy Spirit (see Ac 2:38).

WHAT IS BAPTISM? IT IS TO FULFILL THE PASCHAL MYSTERY OF JESUS THROUGH A SACRAMENTAL SIGN. The body of sin that Jesus Christ nailed to the cross dies. But that would not be enough. If Jesus had not been raised, what would he have demonstrated? That we are all rascals, that no one has fulfilled the law and that we have condemned Jesus, asking mercy for a murderer. And with that none of us would be saved. It would have demonstrated that our body is a body of sin. This is why St. Paul tells us: If Christ has not been raised, then our faith would be in vain and we would still be in our sin (see 1 Cor 15:17). BUT THE FATHER HAS RAISED THE ONE WHO CHOSE TO MAKE HIMSELF SIN (2 Cor 5:21). He was condemned in the name of the law that says: cursed be the one who is hanged on a tree (see Ga 3:31; Dt 21:23). HE HAS TAKEN OUR PLACE AND HE HAS ALLOWED OUR SINS TO NAIL HIM THERE. YOUR SINS AND MY SINS ARE WHAT HE BORE ON THE CROSS AND FOR WHICH HE DIED. OUR SINS BROUGHT HIM TO DEATH, TO SHOW WHAT THEY DO TO US. Because if we have been created in the image and likeness of God and if he died for our sins, we too, are dead because of our sins. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF LIFE. HE IS THE LORD OF

SINAI. BUT SINCE HE HAS TAKEN YOUR PLACE AND MY PLACE AND HAS BEEN INTO THE TOMB IN OUR PLACE and THE FATHER HAS RAISED HIM, HE HAS ALSO RAISED US. HE HAS RAISED HIM AS A PLEDGE, AS A GUARANTEE, THAT YOUR SINS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, THAT NOW WE HAVE ACCESS TO THE LIFE OF GOD, THAT NOW WE CAN BE BORN FROM GOD. And in the same way the Word of God said: Let there be light and there was light, St. Paul says that (see 2 Cor 4:6). God gives us this Word, the kerygma that has the power to bring a new creature to birth through the power of the Word of God.

Do you know what faith is? TO BELIEVE THAT WHAT WE ARE SAYING IS POSSIBLE, THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO BE TRULY BORN FROM GOD, TO BELIEVE THAT ALL YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN AND YOU HAVE ACCESS TO ETERNAL LIFE, TO GOD'S NATURE. The Fathers of the Church said that the announcement of this Word is the sperm of the Spirit because it has the power to beget a new creature in man. A NEW CREATURE BEGINS TO GROW IMMEDIATELY IN HIM WHO BELIEVES IN THE PREACHING. The photograph of this new creature is Jesus Christ. THE RISEN CHRIST IS THE WORK THAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU SO THAT YOU MAY BE SAVED. HE IS THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD. GOD WANTED TO MANIFEST HIS FACE IN TO US JESUS CHRIST.

SO WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO?

BE CONVERTED AND BE BAPTIZED, INVOKING THE NAME OF JESUS.

BE BAPTIZED. If you acknowledge that you are truly a sinner, if you let this catechesis judge you, if you let the cross of Jesus Christ denounce you as a sinner because you did not allow yourself to be killed by anyone (and this is the law and the prophets), if you accept it, then you are the greatest, you are sentenced to death, you are in hell. Man is judged and condemned as a sinner by the cross of Christ.

But no. NOW I ANNOUNCE TO YOU A GOOD NEWS: GOD HAS RAISED UP THIS JESUS FOR YOU. GOD HAS CONSTITUTED HIM YOUR LORD, KYRIOS. HE HAS SENT HIM TO US SO THAT HE MAY GIVE US LIFE, SO THAT IF YOU BELIEVE IN HIM AND LEAN ON HIM, NOW YOU MAY BE BORN AGAIN, BE BORN FROM GOD.¹²

If you believe this, you can be baptized right now, or, if you're already baptized, you can renew your Baptism. If someone here says: I believe this, I believe that God is so powerful that this very minute he can destroy my body of sin and give me a new life, he can be brought to the waters. Do you truly believe that Jesus Christ is living and that he has been constituted your Lord so that you can be born again from water

¹² CCC 521 Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived and he lives it in us. "By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man" (GS 22). We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model: "We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of Jesus' life and his mysteries and often to beg him to perfect and realize them in us and in his whole Church... For it is the plan of the Son of God to make us and the whole Church partake in his mysteries and to extend them to and continue them in us and in his whole Church. This is his plan for fulfilling his mysteries in us" (St. John Eudes).

and the Holy Spirit? He who believes this can be submerged in the waters as a sign that he wants to bury his body of sin, that he wants to renounce Satan and all the sins he has committed up to now. If someone believes this and says: I swear that I will never listen to Satan again, he can take off his clothes as a sign that he undresses himself of his selfishness, of his lust, of his vanity, of whatever he has been until now and he is led into the water.

But perhaps he says: the fact is I don't believe I will stop being lustful, you know? Then you don't believe. Because this is in Jesus' power, not yours. But imagine! Will it be you who stops drinking, who stops being selfish? You cannot. Precisely because you cannot, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, victorious over death, has been sent to you. If you could do it, what good would Jesus be? The law would be enough.

The one who really believes this undresses himself, goes down the steps and submerges himself in the water, leaving there the corpse of the man of sin, invoking the name of Jesus, the Name that is above all other names.

The serpent, the devil, death and sin dominate man. JESUS CHRIST HAS OVERCOME ALL THIS. HE HAS BEEN CONSTITUTED BY GOD AS KYRIOS OF EVERYTHING (money, marriage, children, prestige, sexuality, etc.). IN HIM YOU HAVE SALVATION. ONLY IN HIM THERE IS SALVATION FOR THIS WORLD, THERE IS ACCESS TO GOD. ONLY IN HIM CAN YOU REALLY BE RECREATED, RECOVERING THE IMAGE OF GOD IN YOU AND BECOMING, THROUGH ADOPTION, GOD HIMSELF, A SON OF GOD, WITH THE NATURE OF GOD.

When this same man comes out of the water of baptism, he comes out with a new body, because he has believed and has invoked, as a child, the name of Jesus. This is not a trick. It is reality: he has received a new body. As a sign and confirmation that he had received this new body, the apostles, who have the power of giving the Holy Spirit, would impose hands on the newly baptized when he came out of the water. First, the body of sin was destroyed, then the new shining body was taken out of the water. Finally, the Holy Spirit was infused into him through the imposition of hands, the invocation of the name of Jesus and the anointing with oil (symbol of the Holy Spirit). Then a white garment was put on him and, as a sign of victory, a crown of laurel and he passed to the Lord's Supper, to celebrate the Eucharist. The baptized Christian has already entered into divinity, into the Kingdom of God and can pass to the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a celestial Eucharist, before the Lamb, the angels and saints.

You see how, speaking about the kerygma, I have to speak about the Sacraments because it is expressed better with Sacraments rather than words.

WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS?

THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS BROKEN DEATH. HE HAS OVERCOME IT, HAS BROKEN THE CIRCLE OF DEATH THAT ENSLAVES US AND HE HAS ESTABLISHED A NEW DIMENSION IN LOVE.

If you have accepted the first part of the catechesis and recognized that we are encircled by the power of sin, submitted to the devil, that it is true that man is in a situation of

death; if we are certain of this, THEN IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT DEATH AND SIN HAVE BEEN OVERCOME IN THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST WHO, IN HIS FLESH, HAS DESTROYED AND BURIED THE BODY OF SIN. IN HIS FLESH HE HAS DESTROYED THE POWER OF THE SERPENT. HE LET THE SIN OF HUMANITY BRING HIM TO THE CROSS AND HE MADE HIMSELF SIN FOR US. SO, IF THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH, IF SIN HAS SEIZED ALL MEN AND HAS PUT THEM INSIDE THE CIRCLE OF DEATH IN SUCH A WAY THAT ALL OF US MEN ARE SLAVES, IF THEN CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM DEATH, IT MEANS THAT SIN HAS BEEN FORGIVEN.

The news we bring you is this: A MAN HAS BEEN RAISED. THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD OF THIS MAN IS GOOD NEWS FOR ALL MEN BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN RAISED AS THE FIRST-FRUIT. HE HAS BEEN RAISED FIRST TO JUSTIFY ALL HUMANITY, TO SHOW ALL MEN THAT THE SENTENCE OF DEATH HAS BEEN PARDONED FOR ALL, BECAUSE SIN HAS BEEN FORGIVEN.

THE NEWS WE BRING IS THIS: THAT DEATH HAS BEEN OVERCOME, THAT WE DON'T DIE, BECAUSE A MAN HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD and THIS MAN COMES WITH US TO GIVE YOU ETERNAL LIFE.

If the consequence of sin is death, how can it be proved to men that man's ontological death has truly been forgiven, the death of his being, his eternal death and that he can now live forever, that physical death is only a passage, that he does not die? It can be proved only through a fact: WHEREAS BEFORE, MAN, IN A SITUATION OF SIN, ENCIRCLED BY DEATH, COULD NOT GO THROUGH DEATH AND THEREFORE COULD NOT LOVE, NOW THIS MAN DOES WORKS OF ETERNAL LIFE, PASSES THROUGH DEATH, BECAUSE HIS DEATH NO LONGER EXISTS AND HE HAS RECEIVED A NEW LIFE, A NEW SPIRIT, THE SPIRIT OF THE RISEN CHRIST.

Therefore this news is not only that Jesus Christ rose from death but that JESUS CHRIST HAS BEEN CONSTITUTED LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT, FIRST-BORN OF A NEW CREATION, SO THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL RECEIVE HIS SAME SPIRIT AND HIS SAME NATURE.

Until the coming of Jesus Christ there was only one kind of creation: Adam, carnal man, living in a situation of sin and death. BUT IN JESUS CHRIST, GOD INAUGURATES A NEW CREATION, A NEW HUMANITY: THE NEW MAN. JESUS CHRIST IS THE FIRST-BORN OF THIS NEW CREATION. HE HAS BEEN CONSTITUTED OUR SAVIOR. IN HIM GOD AND MAN UNITE. HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE NEW HUMANITY. TO HIM ALL POWERS ARE SUBMITTED BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN CONSTITUTED BY THE FATHER AS LORD AND KYRIOS OF ALL THE POWERS THAT ENSLAVE US, BIND US, DESTROY US.

If there is someone here who recognizes that he is submitted to some power, let him know that in Jesus Christ he can be saved. Because Jesus is Lord of all humanity. There is no other name on earth by which man can have salvation. At the Name of Jesus every knee in heaven and on earth will bend and in him salvation will be known, because in him God is reconciling the world to himself. While I am talking to you, Christ Kyrios is showing his glorious wounds to his Father, interceding for you, so that you can receive the Holy Spirit.

All the catecheses the devil has given to man, that God is not love, that the law is the external sign that God does not

love us, Jesus Christ has overcome in his own body. In his body he has destroyed the body of sin. He has demonstrated on the cross that God is love; because he is God.

Just look at how much God loves you. He died in your place. And he has come to announce to you the GOOD NEWS ON BEHALF OF GOD: THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS ALREADY COME. And it didn't matter that we were killing him; he forgave us anyway.

This is why Jesus, who has been constituted life-giving Spirit by the Father, COMES TO GIVE ETERNAL LIFE, HIS OWN SPIRIT. HE COMES TO TAKE AWAY THE SPIRIT OF SIN AND TO GIVE US HIS OWN SPIRIT. HE COMES TO REMOVE FROM US OUR HEART OF SIN AND GIVE US THE HOLY SPIRIT. HE COMES TO RECREATE HUMANITY.

This is why Christianity is a new creation in which we are born again, born from God.

This is expressed in Baptism. We leave the corpse of the old man, the body of sin buried in the waters of Baptism.

FOR JESUS CHRIST, WITH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION, HAS DESTROYED THE BODY OF SIN. HE HAS BURIED IT IN THE PRIMORDIAL WATERS. HE HAS DESTROYED THE STRENGTH OF SIN AND DEATH and HE HAS SET MAN FREE. NOW JESUS COMES TO LIVE IN MAN, TO GIVE MAN THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING BORN FROM GOD. HE COMES TO MAKE US CHILDREN OF GOD, HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

IN CHRIST, HUMANITY ATTAINS THE DIMENSION THAT GOD HAD PREPARED AT THE BEGINNING, BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD: GOD HAS CHOSEN US TO BE HOLY AND IMMACULATE IN HIS PRESENCE IN LOVE, TO BE THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY, THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE, THE GLORY OF HIS BELOVED, IN WHICH HE LOVED US INFINITELY (see Eph 1:4-6).

GOD DID NOT DISDAIN TO DESCEND TO THE DEPTHS OF YOUR SIN IN ORDER TO KILL YOUR SIN ON THE CROSS, TO FORGIVE ALL YOUR SINS and FREELY TO GIVE YOU THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING A SON OF GOD. HE GIVES YOU HIS GRACE AND HIS SPIRIT THROUGH WHICH YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THE FATHER. YOU, IN CHRIST, ARE HEIR OF GOD, BROTHER OF JESUS CHRIST, SO THAT YOU CAN CALL GOD FATHER, ABBA, FEELING IT, HAVING REAL TRUST IN GOD. SO THAT IF GOD PUTS HIS SPIRIT IN YOU, EVERYTHING CONTRIBUTES TO YOUR GOOD, EVERYTHING IS GRACE, EVERYTHING IS LOVE, BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN TAKEN OUT OF THE SITUATION OF TERROR, OF DEATH and OF SIN and YOU LIVE IN GRACE, GRATUITOUSLY, IN THE LOVE OF GOD. YOU ARE NO LONGER UNDER THE POWER OF THE LAW, BUT UNDER THE RULE OF GRACE. GOD HAS FORGIVEN ALL YOUR SINS. GOD LOVES YOU EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE THE BIGGEST SINNER OF ALL.

Baptism, I was saying, allows us truly to live this reality. Man undresses himself of his body of sin through a time of catechumenate and he enters the water that symbolizes death, a death like that of Christ. He leaves the corpse of the man of sin in the water and rises, just as Christ did, by the work of the Holy Spirit, through the love of the Father. God loves you with the same love with which he loved Christ, raising him from death: he loves you in the same way. He loves you in such a way that, in Christ, you can be saved from death, you can enter your everyday deaths, without fear. For if his Spirit lives in you, God is not going to leave you in death.

In Christ, God loved all men and he has created us in Christ to be children of his love, love that knows no limit. He loves you even though you are the most vile person, though you have been unfaithful to him eighty thousand times. He loves you though you are a hardened sinner and are disgustingly proud. Even if you are a drunk, if you are lustful, vain, an idiot, God loves you without limit and he will love you always. God has not created you to die, to be condemned, but so that you may live in love.

This is why St. Paul says to the Christians: you no longer owe your life to flesh and blood because these have brought you to death. Now you give your life to Christ because he has begotten you from the Father for an inestimable treasure of glory, for a new life, for an eternal life that does not perish. You are already risen with Christ: the man of the Spirit is a pneumatic man, not a carnal man (see Rm 8:12; Eph 2:4-7).

HOW IS THE FACT THAT WE HAVE BEEN MADE NEW CREATURES EXPRESSED? IN THE CHURCH. THE CHURCH IS THE SIGN OF THE GOOD NEWS THAT COMES TO MEN. IT IS A COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO LOVE EACH OTHER IN A DIMENSION THAT NO ONE CAN ACHIEVE: IN THE DIMENSION OF THE CROSS, BEYOND DEATH. THESE MEN LOVE TO THE EXTENT OF GIVING THEIR LIVES. THE CHURCH MAKES VISIBLE THE FACT THAT THE LOVE OF GOD, LOVE WITHOUT LIMIT, HAS PUT HIS TENT AMONG US IS MADE VISIBLE IN THE CHURCH.

You have been elected to be the sanctuary of this love. If you are a Christian, this love lives in you and makes you walk. NOTHING AND NO ONE CAN DIVIDE YOU FROM THIS LOVE.

THIS LOVE IS OFFERED FREELY TO EVERY CREATURE. THIS LOVE IS GIVEN TO YOU. And you will see it as a tangible reality.

It's terrible to make the Church a natural religiosity where man saves himself through practices, when the Church is something so much more impressive: it is the temple of God, the Body of Jesus Christ.

EIGHTH DAYTHE KERYGMA (second part)¹

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The Good News (3, 164, 389, 422, 571, 632, 634, 638, 714, 763, 852, 856, 977, 1427, 2443, 2527, 27630); conversion (1226, 1262, 1287, 1427); the Holy Spirit (683-701); the Spirit and the Word of God in the time of the promises (701-716); the Spirit of Christ in the fullness of time (717-730); the Spirit and the Church in the last days (731-741).

A - Paris 1978

(Carmen)

We are here today to speak about the central event of Christianity and it is very difficult to speak about "Resurrection" because this word is in fashion today.

The fact that Jesus Christ was resurrected 2,000 years ago doesn't seem to be news, because news is the event of the day. But the Gospel, that is the Good News, is not so much that Jesus Christ rose from the dead 2,000 years ago, but that this event of resurrection is given today, tonight, that it is here, present for us, who today can experience life, we who are full of fears, of selfishness, of death, of powerlessness. St. Paul says that to see Jesus Christ in flesh and blood doesn't count for anything (see 2 Cor 5:16). The apostles went everywhere preaching the Gospel, not because they have seen Christ risen, but because they had received his Spirit from him, the Spirit that gives life, which raises up from death, which gives power over death, over every kind of death.

The Scriptures, which we shall read today (Acts, St. Paul etc.) say that God raised Jesus, lifted him up, exalted him, glorified him and made him life-giving Spirit. The apostles knew the life-giving Christ, a life-giving Spirit that transformed them, which gave them a new vision of life, another outlook on existence and which commanded them to announce this news to the world. This set the apostles on the way: "Go to Galilee and there you will see me" (see Mt 28:10). Like the apostles, we too shall see Christ there, in Galilee, that is, in the pagan world where Jesus will be manifested through the preaching, raising the pagans to life from their death.

For this service God uses poor people like Moses who was a stammerer, like us who can barely speak. And this enters into the plan of revelation: through the "foolishness" of the preaching God is made manifest. In fact, God wants to manifest the resurrection, life. He wants to give this power of resurrection to man through the Cross.

¹ Included here in sequence are two versions of the same catechesis, the second part of the Kerygma.

We, too, like the apostles, have had this experience. We have betrayed Jesus, we have all abandoned him in times of suffering and none of us can boast of faithfulness to Jesus on the Cross through our good works. Resurrection is always something surprising: man cannot achieve it by himself. St. Paul says that to have seen Christ alive after his death is not what is important; what is fundamental is that God allowed the apostles to have the same experience of life as Jesus Christ risen, that he gave them his life-giving Spirit for all men. It was this experience that set them on a way of preaching, to give this Spirit to the world. And this Spirit comes through the very announcement of the news, it is always given through the preaching, it is the Holy Spirit who precedes. God says to Moses: "I am who I am, I will be there" (see Ex 3:14). The people of Israel will recognize that God acts there, in Egypt. And in the Cenacle, after the resurrection, Jesus says to the apostles: "I am and I shall be with you until the end of time." "Go and preach and I will be there with you" (see Mt 28:20).

Today, it is very difficult to listen to the announcement made by the apostles. We all think we truly believe that Jesus Christ is risen. But perhaps this is not true. The experience of the risen Christ which the apostles had is not yesterday's experience. It is experienced today, now, in the present, in the power of life.

Reflections on the resurrection, on the possibility of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, have appeared in many books and today we can accept it as a historical fact of the past. Perhaps we can convince our reason of the possibility of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and this can give us hope for the future, for life beyond death, for immortality. This is what the Greeks did through philosophy.

But the Christian experience of the primitive Church is something else altogether: it is an experience of Jesus Christ, of this power of life. God gives to each apostle not only a news, that Jesus Christ is risen, but he manifests in him the resurrection of Christ. God exalts him from death to life. It is not that this changes the apostle's appearance; but at the same time this Spirit creates in him a new creature, a new reality; for him the kingdom of God has arrived. In him the Lord Jesus is risen, is living and present. He becomes a witness.

That is why an event is reaching you today of which we are witnesses: this power to make life be born today, in our generation, in the selfish heart of this generation in anguish. When the apostles said "we are witnesses" (see Ac 2:32), they didn't mean "we are good" but "we have experienced, free of charge, the wine of the Resurrection of the Lord, Life, a new way of being, communion, being one single heart with all those who are called to the kingdom of God, to the Church. We are called to constitute a body where LIFE and the RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST are made manifest."

It is an event that we are still experiencing here today, the power of Jesus Christ in you, in families, in society, in the hardest of hearts. This power of Jesus Christ is always

present in the evangelization and we experience it every day. This power is in our very powerlessness and weakness.

This power, this Spirit, desires with all its strength to reach us, to make Passover with us, to make us pass from death to life.

I've been saying this to clean your ears out a little so you can listen, so that you are able to receive this Spirit which is ready to descend on you today.

In the primitive Church the resurrection of Jesus Christ was "the Light," the only Sun, which made the existence of the Church possible in a hostile world. In the *Acts of the Apostles* and in the writings of the primitive Church what is striking is the Life that springs up in the midst of persecutions and difficulties. Life, LIFE that has conquered death and which presents itself as joy and communion on earth, like Light, like something unique for the primitive Church. Why is it not like that at times today?

It can be represented by the image of the sun. [Do a drawing]. The sun always shines but during the winter, clouds obscure its rays. Sometimes in history this sun of the resurrection - which has always been present, otherwise the Church would not exist - has been obscured, not only by the sins of us Christians, but also by certain decayed and defective forms of tradition, which prevent these rays of the resurrection from manifesting themselves. Among these clouds there are also certain theological conceptions that are too abstract and rationalistic.

The Church has this sun, but, in these cases, it is hidden and we don't receive this joy, this light, this warmth, this life which makes us be reborn every day from death, from our sin, to a new creation which we see shining in the primitive Church.

So I will try to dispel these clouds a little and to give you the possibility of listening, in a little while, to St. Peter and St. Paul who will proclaim Christianity to us. Sometimes many of us have received Jesus Christ, the Sun, in such a filtered manner that this way of life, of resurrection, perhaps has never really reached us. I too, like you, have received this wind of Christianity through a certain theological explanation of the "redemption."

Here is a brief synthesis. Man has committed an offense against God. Since God is infinite, this offense, too, is infinite and man can never pay for this infinite offense. He is condemned. This is why it is necessary for God to intervene and send his Son. [You can draw weighing scales.] We have committed an offense, an infinite offense. Man is condemned; it is impossible for him to get out of this situation. And God has intervened in man's favor and has sent his Son. This Son of God began to earn merits as recompense for this offense; he has done many extraordinary things and has suffered. Since he is God, these sufferings give an infinite value to his merit. Therefore, with his passion and death he has earned infinite merit and has

evened out the scale, this infinite offense and has re-opened the relationship with God.

Perhaps this is what you and I received as Christian formation, as the announcement of Jesus Christ.

Now this is not wrong but it is very incomplete, because in this scheme, you understand, the resurrection of Jesus Christ does not appear. It would be unnecessary if it were only the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ that gained the merit. The resurrection is then presented as a glorious ending, both result and prize, to show that he is God.

But if we listen to St. Peter we shall see that the content of his preaching is different.

So there has been a great cloud that prevented us from receiving THE NEWS, the event that God has made for us, in its fullness.

These theological terms belong to a given vision, influenced by a certain juridical mentality that belongs to a particular medieval theology. The Second Vatican Council no longer speaks in these juridical terms, but speaks about the PASCHAL MYSTERY, which is a completely different thing, because "paschal" refers directly to history, to the historical intervention of God with the people of Israel. To speak of redemption in the terms above is an abstraction, while to speak about the paschal mystery is concrete history, an event. This form of explaining the redemption is applied externally to man but it does not transform man internally. It is as if a person pays to free a man from prison. When he comes out of prison, the man may have the same heart as before, perhaps nothing in him has changed. What the apostles preached is something very different.

The apostles had an interior certainty founded on the fact of the Resurrection of Christ. What they announce, we will announce to you this evening. The Spirit always accompanies the Word announced by the apostles.

To be able to listen to the announcement, remember that the apostles are Jews and that Jesus Christ too is a Jew and also that Jesus Christ is not an isolated and spontaneous manifestation of God.

Before Jesus Christ, God had already manifested himself. Before him, there is a whole history of preparation for his coming. And it is impossible to know the intervention of God through Jesus Christ if we are not aware of the preparation for this event in the history of the people of Israel.

In their history the people of Israel have a unique and marvelous experience that is the manifestation of God on Sinai.

This is what this people knows and the reason why it lives. The whole people HAS SEEN GOD on Sinai, has seen the Word of God which came out of his mouth and which came down to rest upon the people. This Word said to them: "I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. LISTEN, ISRAEL. I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD."

The people knew God and, for a long time, was incapable of writing the Word of God, of either writing or saying his name

aloud. To this day a Jew will never say the name of God. He substitutes it with other terms, like the Lord, the Holy One. The Jew knows that the name contains the power of God. He has a great experience of the power of God and who God is, entirely different from man.

It is good to know all this because the apostles experienced the DAY OF PENTECOST. Pentecost is not originally a Christian feast but a Jewish feast that the Jews celebrate with great solemnity to this day. It is the feast of THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD to the people on Sinai. On that day the apostles received the Spirit of God that showed them that all these events of Jesus Christ dead and risen were a work of God. "This Jesus, this man that you have crucified, GOD raised from the dead, raised him up above all things and constituted him KYRIOS, ADONAI, LORD" (see Ac 2:32).

For Israel it is an absolute scandal, a blasphemy, to say that a man who was crucified, who had died, is the Lord. To affirm that one has known and seen in a man the Lord of Sinai, God, the inaccessible one, that one has had the same experience of Sinai, is absolutely unacceptable.

This is the kerygma: the guarantee, the absolute certainty that God put into the hearts of the Jewish apostles that precisely this man, Jesus Christ crucified, is the Lord. We say it very superficially because we don't know what we are saying. We always think that Jesus was not MAN, but that GOD sent his Son (even if this is true).

In the kerygma, St. Peter says: "This MAN whom you have crucified, this Jesus, God has made Lord, Kyrios and Messiah" (see Ac 2:22-24). The Messiah is the entire hope of a new and supreme manifestation of God that Israel waits for throughout its history. And for Israel it is impossible for this manifestation to come through the CROSS, through a crucifix, which is why the Jews are still waiting for a glorious manifestation of God.

The apostles experienced all these events and they are witnesses that this is the work of God. But for whom was this work of God done? Perhaps for his Son? Certainly not, because his Son was already in the kingdom of God beforehand.

We know that God did this work in a MAN, Jesus, who, for St. Paul and the Scriptures, is the second Adam, the new Adam (see 1 Cor 15:45).

For Israel, Adam is "man," not just a person. God exalted the man Jesus for HUMANITY, for us. It is for us that God has spread this work of the resurrection of human flesh and has made it LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT (see 1 Cor 15:45). It is the work of God spread throughout the earth.

This experience of life over the death of the body of man is the experience of faith which the apostles saw and which formed the first community. AND ALL THIS IS AN EVENT THAT COMES TO US TODAY.

You understand how necessary it is to know how to listen and how much we need to clean our ears out. In fact, when we hear that Jesus Christ is the Lord, it doesn't mean anything to

us because for us, naturally, Jesus Christ is the Lord. In fact we have tamed the cross and resurrection. And we don't realize that the cross is even more scandalous for us and for our world than for the Jewish people.

We think that we believe in the cross whereas it is very difficult to believe in the cross. In fact, when the cross falls on your shoulders tomorrow, you will see all your rebellion and you certainly won't see God in the cross. On the contrary, the cross is precisely the means we have of denying God. We have made Jesus into a good man who suffered a lot and we have a sentimental relationship with the cross. Poor thing, how he suffered... But this is not the problem because there are many people who have suffered much more than Jesus Christ. Today, in hospitals, in wars, in concentration camps, etc., there are people who suffer and who have suffered more than Jesus Christ.

What makes the cross a scandal is not the feeling of suffering.

The scandal of the cross is that God chose to manifest himself precisely through this. And the apostles saw the God of Sinai, the Almighty, in these very events. And this very cross comes in history to CONVINCING US ALL OF SIN.

The apostles initially thought they could follow Jesus Christ in suffering, but they were all encircled by the fear of death and this is the situation for all of humanity.

Anyway, God entered into this situation of death to fulfill his work through Jesus. So the problem is not sentimental stuff like how much Jesus suffered, but that God, LIFE, entered into death, into hell, entered in the depths of human existence. And there, where He shattered death, the resurrection shines in a real, concrete way within human nature.

GOD DID THIS WORK IN JESUS CHRIST and he didn't do it for his Son but he did it for mankind, for Adam, for us.

And we can experience this; it can be an event for us. And this is the unique experience of faith: the meeting with the resurrected life that God has given through Jesus Christ, for history, for man.

Today when we announce the kerygma, this resurrection from death, this cross comes to look for us. This cross comes in the history to convince us of sin. In fact, we can receive the Life from the resurrection because we have sinned. We want to fulfill our life with our own efforts. That is why in the first place the cross convinces us all (and the apostles first), of death, of sin, of powerlessness.

Jesus Christ is not some sort of an ideal, a model, which we can achieve with our efforts. We can never pass from death to resurrection with our GOOD WILL. On the contrary, we shall always fall into death again. That is why the Gospel is very good because it tells us that we are all evil.

Tonight we shall put this existential announcement of resurrection in front of our concrete situation of death. We shall see tonight that no one wants to enter into the cross. This is why we shall enlighten the Gospel about Barabbas.

(Kiko)

How have the apostles announced Jesus Christ, how have they announced the kerygma?

Kerygma is a Greek word that means "the announcement" of salvation, the primordial content that gives salvation.

But before anything else, I want to speak to you about that form of explaining the Christian mystery, about the dogma of the redemption. It is very incomplete, because juridical terms were used which are very far from the concrete man, almost as if man's situation were a juridical situation, as if to offend God were just an infringement of a law.

Today, after the Second Vatican Council, there is a return to the announcement of the Gospel in a more complete way. This says, in fact, that man's situation on earth is not merely a juridical situation of an offense against God, but it is fundamentally an EXISTENTIAL SITUATION OF DEATH, that man suffers in the flesh, suffers at work, suffers...

The Council, which we are bringing to you, rather than speaking about REDEMPTION, speaks about the PASCHAL MYSTERY that is like a new springtime. We don't want to give you a biblical education but to teach you how the apostles announced Jesus Christ.

In the *Acts of the Apostles* we find two forms of the kerygma: "This man whom you saw dead... He is the Adonai, the Lord" (see Ac 2:36). But for the Jews to affirm this is a blasphemy. So God has to do something for people to listen and he gives a sign, the sign of making a paralytic walk. This is why St. Peter says: "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I tell you: stand up!" (see Ac 3:6). And this man who was over 40 years old and whose bones were twisted, stands up and walks. Everyone is astonished and then St. Peter announces the Gospel and the people start listening.

FAITH comes from LISTENING TO THE PREACHING (see Rm 10:17), but if people don't listen, faith is not born. And what does St. Peter say? (see Ac 3:12-26).

"Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all..."

In these words we note something very important. Carmen has already told you this cross is a scandal, that to believe in the cross of Jesus Christ is a scandal. Do you believe in the cross of Jesus Christ?

You know that in the Scriptures the CROSS is called THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD; the Scriptures speak about the SCANDAL OF THE CROSS (see 1 Cor 1:22-25). And why? St. Peter tells us: "You have rejected the Holy One and asked pardon for a murderer." This murderer is called BARABBAS (see Lk 23:19; Jn 18:38-40). In the death of Jesus Christ, God wanted to do something in which he could show man his true situation, to convince him of sin and death.

BARABBAS is a man who fought for the justice and freedom of his people; he is a guerrilla. Rome had conquered Israel and plundered its riches. It is a great injustice. And the Zealots wanted to fight against this injustice. And in an uprising against Pilate, Barabbas kills someone and is arrested.

Pilate questions the people: Who do you want?

God has allowed this same question to be put to you tonight. Each time the kerygma is proclaimed this question presents itself: "Who do you want to set free, Jesus of Nazareth or Barabbas?"

Choose. Perhaps those here who think they are Christian: "I choose Jesus." Well, let's see if it's true.

BARABBAS is convinced that man on earth must fight against injustices. And this is something normal for all men and for all people. Before Jesus Christ, all men fought against injustice. Spartacus who wanted to free men from slavery ended up being crucified. He wasn't a Christian and didn't know Jesus Christ. You see that it isn't necessary for Jesus Christ to come, because if you find that you are a slave, someone will want to free you.

BARABBAS wanted to free his people by using violence. Jesus did something surprising. He allowed injustice to reach his own body and to nail him to the cross. He didn't do anything to stop injustice.

Now I want to speak to you about me. Imagine that I am a Christian. I believe in Jesus Christ etc., etc. But what does his cross mean? Everyone who sees a man who lets himself be killed by another, lets himself be mocked, be robbed, etc., they say: he is an IDIOT, he is like a SHEEP, just like a sheep. No! Man must absolutely not be a sheep, a man must be a man, and he must fight against the other. Because to be a sheep, to be an idiot, is ABSURD.

Like a sheep, JESUS CHRIST let himself be killed; he did not resist evil, selfishness, politics and all the other things that were happening at that time (see 1 Pt 2:23-25; Ac 8:32-33; Is 53:7ff). St. Peter wanted to defend him with the sword and Jesus said to him: "Put away that sword. Don't you think that if my Father wanted to defend me he would send his angels to save me? Put away your sword, because all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (see Jn 18:10-11; Mt 26:51-54).

Jesus Christ allowed our injustice, our sin, the sins of his generation, selfishness, and politics, to take him and put him on the cross. Jesus Christ has taken this selfishness on his own body.

We ask: how is it possible for an innocent man to be killed? And yet, Jesus Christ is innocent; he has not committed any evil. Like a lamb brought to the slaughter he said nothing, he did not open his mouth to speak: look, they are deceiving you, I'm innocent, I've done nothing wrong. Why are you torturing me?

When you discover that an innocent man in France has been guillotined, it's a scandal. When it's discovered in Italy that an innocent man is serving a life sentence, it's a scandal.

Jesus did not want to defend himself. So why did he allow himself to be condemned to death in this way? To show society that it is wrong.

At the time of Jesus the two great lines of Western civilization met: THE FAITH OF ISRAEL on the one hand and ROMAN LAW and Greco-Roman culture on the other.

Pilate asks Jesus: "What is truth?" (see Jn 18:38). He is a man who is looking for the truth, a man who has arrived at such great wisdom that he doesn't believe he possesses the truth. The high points of civilization, Pilate and the Romans on the one hand and the Pharisees with the Jewish people on the other, meet here. And what do they do? They kill, they destroy, the author of life, they kill him like a murderer. This is the reality.

So St. Peter says: Convert, change direction, stop; our society is going in the wrong direction, we are all walking in error. This man Jesus allowed the wickedness of a people to kill him, to fall on him, to kill him on the cross and so we say THAT HE TOOK OUR SINS ON HIMSELF, they nailed him to the cross, thus showing what love is. IF GOD HAD NOT RESURRECTED JESUS, WE COULD SAY: POOR MAN! ANOTHER INJUSTICE OF OUR RICH AND BOURGEOIS SOCIETY. In fact, the bourgeois, the rich, destroy the innocent, the poor, the workers and - the communists would say - Jesus Christ is one of our own. But if Jesus Christ had not risen, then yes, he would only be one of our own.

Yet look what an unexpected and tremendous phenomenon occurs. In fact, this man is not only a man. God raised him from the dead and he appeared to the apostles, alive, saying: I'm not a ghost, touch me, give me something to eat and he eats with them. The apostles who saw him were very struck, but this did not convert them at all. They have seen a miracle, but a miracle does not change the life of a man even if it seems strange.

This man whom God raised from the dead, God made Lord. This Jesus, this way of loving and dying, is God, is Yahweh. God is love. Deus est caritas, God is love (1 Jn 4:8). But what love? Perhaps the love of a fiancée? No! The love of a mother for her child? No, because here there is just a natural, earthly love.

This love is God, a different love. Who is God? He is someone who respects you, who has such great love that he does not defend himself in front of your wickedness. He lets himself be killed by your sin, by your selfishness. He respects you. And I'm asking you now: WHO HAS EVER RESPECTED YOU TO THE POINT OF LETTING YOU DO WICKED THINGS? NO ONE. Who has loved you so very much that he understands that you have the right to make a mistake? Your wife perhaps? Your mother perhaps, or your father?

If you are in a crisis, only God allows you to deceive yourself. He lets you do what you want. Among men things are very different. Obviously, if we live together and you cheat me, you do me harm. So, if I am selfish, I don't want you to harm me and if you do something bad, I won't allow you to.

SO, WHO DO YOU WANT TO SAVE: JESUS OR BARABBAS?

Do you think I believe in the cross of Jesus Christ? I want to give you an example. Imagine I'm married and that I'm a Christian. I get home, I find the house dirty, there is nothing ready to eat because my wife has been busy with other things, or she has done something that has made me angry or she has hurt me... Or a man who arrives home very late and never thinks about his wife who is always at home alone working all day. He never takes her to the cinema; he never takes her out, etc. This woman begins to see that her husband doesn't love her. This man is unjust, he is selfish, he only lives for himself. Yes, this woman is right because her husband never helps her; he never bothers about the children etc. She is right to protest, she is absolutely right. But be careful, what does this woman do? Who does this woman choose? BARABBAS OR JESUS CHRIST? HERE ARE TWO WAYS OF BELIEVING IN JUSTICE.

If this woman chooses Barabbas, what does she do? She says: it isn't possible to go on like this. So she begins to fight, she is violent towards him. For example, she doesn't speak to him at dinner at night, she doesn't open her mouth, she has a long face. And this goes on for one day, two days, three days. This situation begins to get very serious because when they go to bed and the husband wants to touch her, she does not make a sign of forgiveness, she resists stubbornly... She too is being violent towards him. And what is the meaning of this little violence? She fights against the wickedness of her husband who neglects her.

The wife, in fact, is right. The husband in his selfishness is full of wickedness... of course! Thus the husband, so that he doesn't suffer too much, so that he doesn't have to put up with the situation of tension and silence for long, is forced by his wife's violence to do her will in the end. And this also happens when it is the wife who does something wrong.

But if this man or this woman is Christian, if they have chosen Jesus Christ, the way they act is very different, because they then would act like Jesus. In fact, Jesus Christ acted in the opposite way: he let himself be killed by the sins of others. If this woman is Christian and her husband has sinned against her, if she has chosen Jesus Christ and not Barabbas, she forgives her husband, she lets herself be killed by her husband's sin, she lets herself be crucified by his sin.

Look! This is something scandalous and absurd for non-believers. And perhaps we now begin to understand a sentence from St. Paul who says: Every day I am like a sheep led to the slaughter (see Rm 8:36). I carry in my flesh the sign of the death of Jesus. I am despised, beaten, persecuted, insulted and I accept it; I am slandered but I bless... (see Gal 6:17; 2 Cor

4:8-12; 1 Cor 4:11-13). I'm not here to tell you that we must do this because, humanly speaking, man will never be able to do this, because this means the total destruction of his being. In fact, this is not possible.

But, to return to this CROSS, I've been telling you all this simply to tell you that perhaps WE BELIEVE we are Christians, but then in practice, we deny Jesus Christ in every moment of our daily life. Our society doesn't think in this way and in fact, our society is not Christian. It is based on VIOLENCE: if they treat you unjustly, defend yourself; if they don't pay you well, go on strike. Society is based on the class struggle, the struggle of the poor. THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST is for idiots - the Marxists say that it is used to make slaves become even more submissive... Well, tonight what I want to do is precisely to present this cross to you. Do we have this love today? Because THE NEWS is that God has raised this man from the dead. THIS FORM OF LOVE IS THE ONLY TRUTH.

But IF THIS LOVE IS THE TRUTH, we are ALL CONDEMNED.

Perhaps no one has this love; no one loves in this dimension, which is called "the dimension of the Cross." No one loves others to the point of being Christ every day bearing the sins of his generation. You know that when we celebrate the Eucharist, we have communion with Christ. And this means that we, who today are Christ, carry the sin of our generation on our shoulders.

So I'm asking you: today, are you carrying someone's sins? To carry someone's sins means that if someone commits some injustice against you, if they beat you, you accept the slap, you don't hit back. To carry someone's sins means that if this brother does something bad, I understand that perhaps he is mistaken and I carry the blame on my shoulders and I don't pay him back evil for evil. I accept him.

You know that the cross of Jesus Christ is the point at which all the wicked actions of the world are gathered together and stop. The evil of the wickedness of the world stopped at the cross of Jesus Christ and it did not go beyond it, because Jesus Christ received the wickedness and GAVE BACK FORGIVENESS. He has forgiven freely. He has forgiven all the murderers in the world, all the prostitutes on earth, all the selfishness of the earth, all the wicked actions, all the executioners in the concentration camps. What did the apostles preach and what does this cross mean to you today? JESUS CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS AND GOD HAS RAISED HIM UP FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION (Romans 4:25).

How can you know that Jesus Christ has forgiven you, that he has forgiven you all the errors you have committed in your life: selfishness, pride, crimes against others, offenses against love? This love in the dimension of the cross is the only love, this IS THE TRUTH. And today your life is judged in this light and perhaps attitudes showing this kind of love have never been found in you. You have never loved another person to the point of making yourself sin for him, you have never loved a thief. You would like him to be taught not to steal because you think: "What if he robs me?" You have never loved someone who

has robbed you because you think: "If I make myself sin for him, then I'm helping him to continue in his error and in his sin!"

But Jesus Christ became sin for us, GOD has made himself sin for us (see 2 Cor 5:21), God has loved us when we were still sinners (see Rm 5:8).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says something astonishing: "If someone slaps you, do not refuse him the other cheek; if someone wants to take your cloak, give him your trousers too..." (see Mt 5:38-40).

This is the Sermon on the Mount. And don't think that I am interpreting Christianity badly, because the Sermon on the Mount is considered by the Church to be a catechesis and this catechesis was preceded by the kerygma and a way of conversion.

Why does Jesus Christ say not to resist evil? Because that is simply what God has done with you and with me.

Perhaps you think that God hasn't done it with you because perhaps you feel you are good. Maybe some of you don't accept my preaching because you feel you are very good and you've never done wrong. But I tell you, Jesus Christ said: "If someone strikes you, offer the other cheek." Jesus Christ said this because God has done it with us each time we were against him.

But when were we against God? We have never seen God. We have been against God every time we were against a brother or sister! In fact men were created by God, nature was made by God and every time I have been violent towards another person, I have destroyed the action of God, I have destroyed love, which is the truth created by God on earth.

And what did God do when I was evil? He didn't cut off one of my hands, he didn't punish me harshly, he didn't defend himself from me but he loved me, he forgave me. God loved me so very much that he answered my wickedness with forgiveness, with mercy and has given me a new spirit.

Brothers and sisters, CONVERT! Convert TODAY to this cross and accept it as the TRUTH. Repent. You can say to me: what must we do? (see Ac 2:37). If you believe that this is the truth, you can receive this spirit. If you have the spirit of Jesus Christ, you will do the same things as Jesus Christ, because the spirit of Jesus Christ is something free. In fact, you receive it free. It will enable me to love others without effort on my part.

When he was speaking to the catechumens who had done four years in the catechumenate and wanted to go to the waters of baptism, St. John Chrysostom said: How many times must I repeat that you cannot go to baptism until the day in which you love in this dimension without effort, without sacrifice, because faith is a free gift? If you receive the spirit of Jesus Christ, this spirit will lead you to love in this dimension, without effort, that is to say, naturally, with the nature and the power of the Spirit which comes to live within us.

That is why tonight I'm announcing forgiveness to all of you. Whoever believes this preaching will be able to receive this Spirit.

In fact, God raised this man who died for your sins to life and now he is alive before the Father and intercedes for your sins and now we can receive this same Spirit.

What is this Spirit? THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. Because this Spirit is GOD HIMSELF. If you find sin in yourself, it is not possible for you to find God at the same time. Sin destroys. At Pentecost the apostles received this same Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus Christ risen from the dead, which made them understand that the Crucified One is God. That is why they set out with great strength. This Spirit worked a miracle in them, it created love among them, communion. Before receiving this Spirit they had a lot of trouble accepting others, but now this Spirit has renewed them, it has caused them to be reborn, it has given them the same nature as God.

What is God's same nature? The Church says it is CHARITY and charity is this love. God is this love. Whoever has this love is a son of God. Do you think you are a child of God?

It is certain that we become children of God through Baptism; with this sacrament we become Christians and really receive the gift of the Spirit as first fruits or pledge of eternal life.² And this doesn't depend on our merits or our

² In reference to this, see the CCC: "Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte "a new creature," an adopted son of God, who has become a "partaker of the divine nature" <2 Cor 5:17>, member of Christ and co-heir with him and a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1265). "The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification: enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him and to love him through the theological virtues; giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit; allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues. Thus the whole organism of the Christian's supernatural life has its roots in Baptism" (1266). "Baptism, the Eucharist and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed" (1285). "It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost" (1302). "From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!" <Rm 8:15>; it unites us more firmly to Christ; it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; it renders our bond with the Church more perfect; it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name

consistency. I'm speaking here about another aspect, that is, living as children of God, living in the sanctity of the sons of God. It is precisely for this that we want to be on a way that will awaken in us the gift we have received.

Sanctity means: loving the enemy. This is the love of God. He loved us in this dimension. "Love one another as I have loved you." Love one another now that you have received the Holy Spirit. You know that the Gospels are an itinerary and Jesus Christ says to his disciples "Love one another" only after the Last Supper, that is when they have received the entire Christian education, when they have received the Holy Spirit. You need to go through Baptism before proceeding to the Eucharist and becoming one with Christ and receiving his Spirit in its fullness.

And now that you have received the Holy Spirit, that you are heavenly, without any effort on your part, now you can love one another as I have loved you. WITH THIS FORM OF LOVE MEN WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, because no one can love like this. No one can give his life for another, for a sinner, for a wicked person; on the contrary these people should be put in prison, banished, made harmless.

When Fidel Castro comes to power he takes 500 individuals who have been judged by the people and kills them. This is clear, it is normal, this is the law of society. No one ever loves the other when he is a sinner, wicked, a deceiver, a liar, a fornicator, an adulterer...

God knows your adulteries, your fornications; you do not scandalize him. He is the only one who loves you, the only one who forgives you, who doesn't need your efforts.

St. Peter says: "Convert and believe the GOOD NEWS." In the Scriptures, to convert means: believe this news, which is that this love has been raised to life, has been glorified, is the Kyrios, and is the Lord of all things. This is the only truth: society will die, art will die, everything will die.

This is the love that has saved me because I was a very wicked man... If I were to tell you about my life... I, an artist, a bohemian... God loved me, he forgave me, he is the Only One.

of Christ boldly and never to be ashamed of the Cross" (1303). "Today the word "ordination " is reserved for the sacramental act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters or deacons, ...for it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit" (1538). "This presence of Christ in the minister is not to be understood as if the latter were preserved from all human weaknesses, the spirit of domination, error, even sin. The power of the Holy Spirit does not guarantee all acts of ministers in the same way. While this guarantee extends to the sacraments, so that even the minister's sin cannot impede the fruit of grace, in many other acts the minister leaves human traces that are not always signs of fidelity to the Gospel and consequently can harm the apostolic fruitfulness of the Church" (1550).

8th Day: The Kerygma (second part)

That is why I gave my whole life to God. The life my mother and father gave me brought me to suicide; I wanted to kill myself. He was the only one who loved me when I was perfidious, wicked, selfish and neurotic. This boundless love has never judged me. Jesus Christ has never judged me. He said to me: I love you. But, Lord, you love me? Me a sinner? Look, I'm selfish, looking for myself in everything, look, I search for... "I love you."

The cross of Jesus Christ caused all the apostles to abandon Him; they were all judged sinners by the cross. In the face of death they left him alone. But the risen Jesus Christ goes to look for them. When the apostles say, "We are witnesses that Jesus Christ is Lord," what do they mean? We, brothers and sisters, are witnesses that God loves us, that he has forgiven us. We have abandoned him, we have denied him. St. Peter denied him in front of a servant girl and Jesus Christ risen went to look for him.

Jesus Christ is here in your midst and he is speaking to you through me. You know that the risen Christ appeared in many different forms in the resurrection. He has different aspects. At one time he is a gardener (see Jn 20:11-18); on another occasion he is a man walking on the road to Emmaus (see Lk 24:13-35). You should know that here you find the risen Jesus Christ who is speaking to you. Perhaps you are selfish people and people who have committed sins. Jesus Christ comes to look for you and comes to say something to you: he loves you; he wants to give you a new life, a new spirit, the Holy Spirit and to make a body out of you.

The world needs to see this Spirit because this Spirit works a miracle: the CHURCH. [*Draw the Church.*]

This spirit needs a new body. With Jesus Christ risen, human flesh entered into the glory of God and can receive a new spirit that creates communion, love amongst men, the visualization of love, of communion and of the New Man. This is the Church! The Church is the visible body of Jesus Christ's resurrection because these men love in this dimension, they love one another. What is this dimension? The DIMENSION OF THE CROSS. And the Holy Spirit, brings us together not by our efforts, not by our moralism. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, is a Spirit that has conquered death, which is resurrected from death and only He can give me the gift of loving beyond death. If someone is wicked he is no longer able to kill me. The Holy Spirit creates within our spirit a new form or relation of love.

There is only one difficulty tonight: the difficulty of listening. You already know these things and if you don't believe, you let the Lord pass by in vain. And this is possible because you have freedom, you can resist the Holy Spirit. But "If today you listen to his voice, do not harden your heart" (see Ps 95:8). If today, not tomorrow. Faith comes from the preaching at the time when this mercy of God who loves you is announced. It is for the sinner who accepts this love of God, who accepts that God is able to love me, a selfish person.

Do you know what is the difference between a Christian and a pagan? Let's go to a bar and imagine we find a pagan and a

Christian drinking coffee. We say to the pagan: You are a selfish, proud man. This man would get very angry and would say: What right have you to insult me? Who does he think he is? Me, selfish? I've never been selfish! You're the one who's selfish! But if we say the same thing to a Christian (imagine that it is St. Francis of Assisi), we tap him on the shoulder and say to him: Excuse me; you are a deeply selfish and proud man! How do you think St. Francis would reply? You've seen very well. I'm even worse than you say. I'm a sinner, a deeply sinful man, selfish, truly selfish.

So a question arises: how is it possible to be a saint and to be selfish? What makes St. Francis of Assisi or any Christian a saint is not that they are no longer selfish (there will always be weaknesses...) but the fact that they know God is the Only One able to love a selfish man.

The pagan is blind to his own situation and every day he signs a certificate of good conduct, because if he is not good, society does not accept him; and because he wants to be accepted by society, every day he tells himself that he is good.

St. Francis of Assisi, on the other hand, was judged by the cross of Jesus Christ. St. Paul says that all men are confined in disobedience, in sin, to use mercy towards everyone (see Rm 11:32). St. Francis of Assisi knew himself deeply and this led him to love God and to know that, in front of others, he didn't need to wear the mask of a good person because God loves him as a sinner. God came to make himself into sin to find the lost sheep. He descended into our deepest reality of wickedness.

St. Theresa of Avila says that when a room is not lit up, it is in darkness and you cannot see the dust, when light enters the room, a strong light, we see the dust.

This means that when a man is blind, he does not know himself but when a man has the Holy Spirit, he knows himself deeply. That is why all the saints of the Church have said that they were sinners. There is not one saint who has not said: "I am a sinner." The saints have not said with false humility, "I'm a sinner (but it's not true)." That wouldn't be the truth. They knew themselves thanks to the Holy Spirit.

Anyone who really knows his reality of being a sinner no longer judges others, because he is worse than others. And we, through a catechumenate, will reach the same conclusion. We shall discover our deep reality of sin.

What is the CATECHUMENATE for the primitive Church? It is to DESCEND until we know our reality of sin and to let ourselves be submerged in the cross. To be submerged in the cross means to be submerged in the water. The water symbolizes death and to be submerged in the cross of Jesus Christ means to DIE (see Rm 6:1-11).

And why do we have to do such a long way? Because it is very difficult to convince ourselves of sin, it is very difficult to really believe that we are sinners.

When man is truly convinced that he is a sinner, then the Church will invite him to strip off this old man and leave him in the water, to believe in the power of God, to believe that if

the Spirit who raised a dead man and brought him out of the tomb, enters into your innermost being, then this same Spirit will raise your body back to life (see Rm 8:11), will make a new creature out of you, a new life.

I would just like to say to you again that what we preach is not something we have invented. Today we have left behind a certain kind of theology and we have returned to the Word of God in order to preach the Good News through it. You can see that what we are saying is exactly what St. Paul said in his letter to the Romans (see Rm 7:14-25). St. Paul speaks about man's situation, who finds himself surrounded by the fear of death, as I explained to you the other day and who cannot love the other because he has not conquered death; who finds himself confronted by a law he doesn't understand, that is, that love is the only truth, while every day he finds himself with the impossibility to love others in this dimension. So every day he experiences DISSATISFACTION and is continually contemplating his selfishness. St. Paul says: This is why I find this law imposing itself on me: the law of loving the other to the point of giving my life; but when I want to do good, then evil presents itself to me. For I delight in the law of God in my innermost self, but I see in my body another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my body. What a wretched man I am! Who will free me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God for Our Lord Jesus Christ!

St. Paul also says (see Rm 8): What happens in the man who has received the Holy Spirit? "There is no longer, therefore, ANY CONDEMNATION for those who find themselves in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit that gives life in Christ Jesus has liberated you from the law of sin and death. In fact - something impossible to the law, which is powerless because of the flesh - GOD, by sending his only Son with a flesh like that of sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so that the justice of the law would be fulfilled in us, who now no longer obey the flesh but the Spirit."

And St. Paul continues: "You are not in the flesh but in the spirit." He is speaking to Christians who have already received Baptism. The Spirit of God LIVES in you!

When we say: Lord, send me your Holy Spirit, we must know that this Spirit is the Spirit that leads us to love others in this dimension. "You are not of the flesh but of the Spirit because the Spirit of God is living in you. He who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, even if the body is dead on account of sin, the Spirit is life because of justice. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who has raised Jesus from the dead will give life even to your mortal bodies, through his Spirit living in you."

This is a proclamation of what the Holy Spirit does in us. My body is dead; it cannot do works of justice. Justice means, "love others." In fact, the LAW is summarized in love towards God and our neighbor and he who loves is just towards God and towards his neighbor.

And we know that the CROSS is the justice of God. St. Paul continues: My body is dead to doing justice because of sin, because sin is living in my body with power, but if the Holy Spirit is given to me freely by the Church, this same Spirit gives my body the strength to do works of eternal life.

The WORKS of ETERNAL LIFE are LOVE, true love, love in the dimension of the CROSS.

Well, we have tried to help you because the problem is this: to believe that Jesus Christ is living today and that he is risen to life for us, that he is present and that he has sent us to you. That is why our being here and speaking to you is an event. He has sent us to you because he wants to give you his Spirit. Because our generation and this neighborhood need to see that it is possible to receive this Spirit. Today there are many people who are suffering: you cannot accept your wife, or perhaps your son is using drugs, or perhaps a son rebels against his parents.

Living is very difficult for us, or we live badly, because we don't have this love in us. But what love? A LOVE THAT HAS CONQUERED DEATH. That is why when someone, like your son, says something that kills you, which destroys you, you suffer a lot. Because we don't want to be killed by others and our relationships are always relationships of little acts of violence. But if you have the Spirit which has overcome death then, freely, you discover something else... then you begin to thank God: Lord, you are great, you have been merciful to me, you have come to search for me, you have given me your Spirit, you have changed me.

B - Madrid 1972

(Kiko)

In this catechesis the first thing you need to do is briefly repeat the previous one: man's situation of slavery, that is, that he is surrounded by the power of sin and death; and the announcement of the Good News.

Then you need to look at the kerygma preached in the Scriptures. This is why we will now look at some texts from the *Acts of the Apostles* and from the *Letters of St. Paul* in which there is the kerygma.

I - ACTS 2: 14-18, 21-33, 36-39

"Then Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judaea and all who dwell in Jerusalem let this be known to you and give ear to my words.'"

The Apostles, like us, call people to listen; when announcing the Good News you need to call people to listen. St. Peter tells them to pay attention, that what is going to be said is very important.

" 'These men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day, but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams; yea and on my maidservant and on my manservant in those days I will pour out my spirit and it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Men of Israel and all who fear the Lord, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourself know - this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified Him and killed³ Him by the hands of lawless

³ CCC 596: The religious authorities in Jerusalem were not unanimous about what stance to take toward Jesus (Jn 9:16; 10:19). The Pharisees threatened to excommunicate his followers (Jn 9:22). To those who feared that "everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation (Jn 11:48)," the high priest Caiaphas replied by prophesying: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish" (Jn 11:49-50). The Sanhedrin, having declared Jesus deserving of death as a blasphemer but having lost the right to put anyone to death (Jn 18:31), hands him over to the Romans, accusing him of political revolt (Luke 23:2), a charge that puts him in the same category as Barabbas who had been accused of sedition. The high

men. But GOD RAISED HIM UP, LOOSING HIM FROM THE PANGS OF DEATH, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning Him: "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in the hope that you will not abandon my soul to death, not let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence."

Brethren, let me tell you clearly that the patriarch David died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day. But since he was a prophet and knew what God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon this throne, he foresaw and spoke of the Resurrection of Christ that He was not abandoned to death, nor did His flesh experience corruption. THIS JESUS GOD HAS RAISED UP."

A man has come from the cemetery, someone who was in the sepulcher for three days, bleeding to death, with his heart pierced and there were witnesses who had seen his heart completely torn open.

"AND WE ARE ALL WITNESSES"

This is very important. The apostle is always a witness of what he announces. And if what I am saying to you now convinces you, it is because you think I am a witness, because my life attests to it. It is clear that the Church is an event: to proclaim this in your midst is to show that this is a fact, otherwise why waste time and energy?

"BEING THEREFORE EXALTED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, HE HAS RECEIVED FROM THE FATHER THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT HAD BEEN PROMISED and HE HAS POURED OUT THIS WHICH YOU SEE AND HEAR."

St. Peter gives a sign: I am a fisherman. I am not the son of prophets nor have I studied and yet I am prophesying. Today the prophecy of Joel is accomplished (see 3:1-5). Why are all these people so transformed that they seem drunk, because they speak in tongues? Because the Holy Spirit has been poured out on them and they have been filled with fire, because the one you

priests also threatened Pilate politically so that he would condemn Jesus to death (see Jn 19:12,15,21).

CCC 598: In her Magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the Church has never forgotten that "sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured." Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself, the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone.

8th Day: The Kerygma (second part)

killed was the promised Messiah. This certainly was big news: the Messiah for whom they were waiting arrived and they took him and crucified him as a murderer. It is such a news to make you die laughing.

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know THAT GOD HAD MADE HIM LORD AND CHRIST, THIS JESUS WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED."

Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One. The word Christ comes from chrism, oil. Scripture says that the one whom God chooses he anoints with oil. It is like when in the book of Samuel the prophet, when he elects Saul, he secretly pours a flask of oil over him and says: You will be the king (see 1 Sam 9:25-10:1). And when a prophet came, they anointed him with oil and everyone threw their cloaks at his feet saying: He is the chosen one.

Christ is God's anointed one. Everyone knew that the Messiah would be the Christ, God's anointed one. Oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit.

"Now, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles: 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them: 'CONVERT AND BE BAPTISED, EVERYONE OF YOU, IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT.'⁴ FOR THE PROMISE IS TO YOU AND TO YOUR CHILDREN AND TO ALL WHO ARE FAR OFF, EVERYONE WHOM THE LORD OUR GOD CALLS TO HIM.'⁵

⁴ CCC1226: From the very day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered holy Baptism. Indeed St. Peter declares to the crowd astounded by his preaching: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)." The apostles and their collaborators offer Baptism to anyone who believed in Jesus: Jews, the God-fearing, pagans (Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; 10:48; 16:15). Always, Baptism is seen as connected with faith: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household," St. Paul declared to his jailer in Philippi. And the narrative continues, the jailer "was baptized at once, with all his family" (Acts 16: 31-33).

⁵ CCC 1287: This fullness of the Spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah's, but was to be communicated to the whole messianic people (see Ezek. 36:25-27; Joel 3:1-2). On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit (Luke 12:12; Jn 3:5-8; 7:37-39; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8), a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday (see Jn 20:22) and then more strikingly at Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4). Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles began to proclaim "the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11) and Peter declared this outpouring of the Spirit to be the sign of the messianic age (see Acts 2:17-18). Those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn (Acts 2:38).

This is the kerygma: a proclamation of the Good News: THIS JESUS CRUCIFIED, A HISTORICAL MAN FROM NAZARETH, HE IS THE MESSIAH, THE SAVIOUR OF ALL MEN. HE IS THE LORD.

This means that if here, today, there is someone who is dominated by some power of nature, by a neurosis, by the biggest problems, he should know that IN JESUS HE HAS ETERNAL LIFE, SALVATION. HE IS THE ONE SENT FOR EVERY MAN AND HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION TOOK PLACE FOR EVERY MAN ON THE EARTH.

People don't believe this. This is why they need to see "signs" and the signs are the Church, which is the Body of Jesus Christ, to whom has been given the power to send the Holy Spirit who was promised throughout all the history of salvation. Ezekiel says: On the great day of Yahweh I will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (see Ez 11:19-20). I will give you my Spirit and you will be able to love each other and live in peace and happiness.

(Carmen)

This is important: St. Peter is a witness, not because he has seen the risen Jesus Christ with his own eyes, because the kerygma does not consist only in the resurrection of a dead man - Lazarus was raised too. The kerygma consists in the fact that in this risen man they recognized the Messiah. Only this is an experience of faith. Neither history nor the event of the resurrection itself can attest to this. The experience of faith, the experience of the Holy Spirit, attests to this. This is an event today, because it is not a matter of being living witnesses to what took place two thousand years ago, nor of having known Christ in the flesh. This is why St. Paul says that knowing Christ in the flesh is of no importance to him. (2 Cor 5:16).

What is important is that this same Spirit bears witness to our spirit (see Rom 8:16). This is why the work that God has done in Jesus for man is to be able to receive this Spirit which gives life to men already starting here and so raises him and frees him from death.

If you read the Scriptures, you will see this: the Good News is not only about the resurrection, but that God has exalted and lifted up this Jesus. This is why the Ascension, which we understand badly, because we believe that it is only about a Jesus who goes flying off into the air, is of great significance. You can see this already in the Old Testament: the chariot of Yahweh that passes, which is a lifting up (see Ez 1). God has lifted up Jesus above every power and authority. That is, God has lifted this man, who was inferior to the angels, up above everything and with him, humanity, above every domination and authority and he has been glorified at the right hand of the Father. That is, God really has made a new creation in man, a creation that is the life-giving Spirit poured out on man. This is why there is salvation for the whole earth, because he has poured out the Holy Spirit and the apostles are witnesses to this.

Just see how far away this is from perfectionism, because this Spirit, by whom the apostles were seized, is poured out on them when the Cross had convinced them all of sin. It is not at all a Spirit of good works and faithfulness to the dead Christ. The Cross denounced them all as sinners. This is also why St. Paul says: "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (see Rom 11:32). The Cross shows and denounces to man his situation of sin. But then God sends Jesus to recreate man with a gift, a new creature through the Spirit. God has done this work by raising Jesus from the dead and lifting him up above all powers as Lord and Kyrios.

It is news, too, because God gave himself to them, for God wanted to save men through the preaching.

(Kiko).

Today we will read exactly how God chose to save men through the foolishness of the preaching. Faith is born from preaching (see Rom 10:17). This is why the Fathers said that the word of the apostles is the sperm of the Spirit.

The angel made an announcement to Mary gave her a Good News. This news is the kerygma. Mary believed and immediately Jesus Christ began to be gestated in her.⁶ The same things happens, the Fathers say, when the apostle announces the Good News of Jesus Christ; the person who welcomes it receives the sperm of the Spirit and Jesus Christ begins to grow in him. So what you are doing now is the most important thing that can be done in the world. You - God through you - are regenerating, through the foolishness of the preaching, the people who are listening to you. You are making sons of God; you are starting off the gestation of faith. For we have said, many times now, that faith is a gestation. This is why faith needs a catechumenate, which is this time of gestation.

II - ACTS 3:13-19

After the previous kerygma we have another also given by St. Peter, when he cures the paralytic at the temple and says:

"The God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, the God of our Fathers, GLORIFIED HIS SERVANT JESUS, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you denied the Holy and the Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and killed the Author of Life. BUT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD. TO THIS WE ARE WITNESSES. And by faith in His name,

⁶ CCC 507 At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church <see LG 63>: "the Church indeed... by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse." <LG 63>

this same Name has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith given through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers, but what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that this Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled. REPENT THEREFORE AND CONVERT YOURSELVES SO THAT YOUR SINS MIGHT BE WIPED OUT."

To convert means to accept this man as the Lord,⁷ as the Adonai, as Yahweh, as the Messiah. It is to recognize that they were mistaken. It is as though we thought that the "soldiers of Christ the King" were the worst of all, or something of the sort and then it turns out that they have the truth. Imagine that we think there's someone who needs to be killed but this person we want to kill is the supreme manifestation of God, He is the whole of the Law and the Prophets.

III - ACTS 13:16-39,42

Now a kerygma from St. Paul. First he tells the history of salvation.

(Carmen)

Every time I discover new things. It's impossible to skip the history of salvation. It's absolutely essential. The biggest proof that Jesus Christ is not an invention of the history of the people of Israel is precisely that they did not accept him. If God had not intervened, it would have seemed that Christianity is a religion that this people had invented. The fact that Israel refused Jesus Christ is the most tangible proof that all this is not of their creation but an exclusive intervention of God. This is why St. Paul says that precisely the fact that they refuse him is itself a work of God (see Rom

⁷ CCC 683 "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" This knowledge of faith is possible only in the Holy Spirit: to be in touch with Christ, we must first have been touched by the Holy Spirit. He comes to meet us and kindles faith in us. By virtue of our Baptism, the first sacrament of the faith, the Holy Spirit in the Church communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son: "Baptism gives us the grace of new birth in God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit. For those who bear God's Spirit are led to the Word, that is, to the Son and the Son presents them to the Father and the Father confers incorruptibility on them. And it is impossible to see God's Son without the Spirit and no one can approach the Father without the Son, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son and the knowledge of God's Son is obtained through the Holy Spirit" (St. Irenaeus).

11). It is a proof that Jesus Christ is a work of God for humanity.

(Kiko)

"Men of Israel and you that fear God, listen: The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the Land of Egypt and with uplifted arm He led them out of it."

He is speaking in the synagogue. They had arrived in Antioch and the rabbis, because they know that he is a Pharisee who has studied a lot and they know the problems he has been through, asked him if he would like to say a word of consolation to the people. So he goes to the lectern and says this:

"And for about forty years He bore with them in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He gave them their land as their inheritance. And after that, He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king and God gave them Saul. After him, He raised up David to be their king, the son of Jesse. Of this man's posterity, God, as He promised, brought to Israel a Savior: JESUS."

At this point the people may have begun to wonder and say: What has happened to him? He must have meant Joshua, not Jesus.

"Before His coming, John had preached a baptism of conversion for the forgiveness of sins to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, when he was asked, he said: "I am not the one you think, but lo, after me One is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie."

Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham and those from among you who fear God, to you HAS BEEN SENT THIS WORD OF SALVATION."

It is magnificent. Here St. Paul calls all of the kerygma the "Word of salvation." This is the reading that is proclaimed at the handing over of the Bibles.

"The inhabitants of Jerusalem and their chiefs fulfilled, without knowing it, the scriptures which are read every Saturday. Though they could charge Him with nothing deserving death, they nevertheless asked Pilate to have Him killed. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. BUT GOD RAISED HIM UP FROM THE DEAD. For many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now HIS WITNESSES to the people. And WE BRING YOU THE GOOD NEWS THAT GOD PROMISED OUR FATHERS."

The promise made to Abraham that all the families would be blessed in him, that all men would be happy...

8th Day: The Kerygma (second part)

" '...GOD HAS FULFILLED IT TO US THEIR CHILDREN BY RAISING JESUS, as it is also written in the second psalm: You are my son, today I have begotten you.'"⁸

Just think that St. Paul says that God has called humanity, mankind, his sons.

" 'AS FOR THE FACT THAT HE RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD NO MORE TO RETURN TO CORRUPTION, HE SPOKE IN THIS WAY. "I will give you the holy and sure blessing of David." Therefore he says also in another Psalm: "You will not let your Holy One see corruption." For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, died and was laid with his fathers and experienced corruption. BUT HE WHOM GOD RAISED UP FROM DEATH, EXPERIENCED NO CORRUPTION. LET IT BE KNOWN TO YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, THAT THROUGH THIS MAN FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS PROCLAIMED TO YOU.' "

It is important to announce this.

" 'AND THROUGH HIM EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES RECEIVES THE TOTAL JUSTIFICATION THAT YOU COULD NEVER GET FROM THE LAW OF MOSES.

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them again the next Sabbath.' "

But the next time, the "guerrillas" were there and Paul had just begun to speak when they began to shout: heretic, you wicked man! And they cursed. They asked him: But who has sent you here? Who is paying you? And he had to go away because these people wanted to beat him up. So he went off to another town nearby and there too he was persecuted and nearly killed. How afraid St. Paul must have been...

IV - ROMANS 4: 118-25

The last passage is very important. We'll begin at verse 18 so as to be able to understand a little what faith is. It is speaking about Abraham and says:

"Abraham hoping against every hope, believed..."

⁸ CCC 638 "We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this day he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus" (Acts 13: 32-33). The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross: "Christ is risen from the dead! Dying, he conquered death; to the dead, he has given life" (Byzantine liturgy).

He believed that God was able to give him a son even though his wife was old and barren.

"He did not waver in front of the promise of God."

That is, in front of the divine promise he did not doubt and he said: If God says so, he will do it.

"But his faith filled him with strength and he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God is powerful enough to fulfill what He had promised. AND THIS WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS SALVATION, as righteousness..."

To believe this, to believe that GOD was really able to make a 95 years old man have a son by an old barren woman. Because God is the one who can do the impossible, because he is the Lord of life and of death. Look what St. Paul says immediately after.

*"... but the words, 'it was reckoned to him' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us IF WE BELIEVE IN HIM WHO RAISED FROM THE DEAD JESUS OUR LORD, WHO WAS PUT TO DEATH FOR OUR SINS AND RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION."*⁹

He says that the same faith that Abraham had, who believed that God could fulfill what he had promised, will work in you as in Abraham, if you believe that the announcement we bring you can be fulfilled by the power of God, that you can receive life, a heart of love in exchange for your heart which is barren of good works. To the one who believes God fulfills in him the promise. He who does not have the faith of Abraham, nothing will come out of his heart, but anger and hatred.

V - ROMANS 8: 1-13

We have already read Romans 7 on various occasions which says that the man of flesh cannot please God because, even if he knows the law with his reason, when he tries to fulfill it and do good, what comes out is evil.

Now let's see what St. Paul says about the man who has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who has been resurrected with Christ.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. For the law of the Spirit of life in

⁹ CCC 571: The Paschal mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the center of the Good News that the apostles and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world. God's saving plan was accomplished "once for all" (see Heb 9:26) by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ.

*Christ Jesus HAS SET YOU FREE FROM THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.*¹⁰

That is, because of sin, the only thing this man can get from the law is to be condemned by it. This is why I said that without Christ, moralisms are of no use to this man. Tell him that he must love, present the law to him; tell him that he is a sinner... The only thing we will get out of it is that he will be left judged and condemned by the law. Because this shows him that he is selfish, that he doesn't love his wife, that he is bourgeois, that he looks for his own interest in everything, that he leaves the house because the children disturb him, etc. The only thing the law can do is this: to denounce. This is what St. Paul is saying here. The law could not give life to this man. It could not make him do works of eternal life, because he is powerless, he cannot do them.

God dealt with sin by sending His own Son in a body as physical as any sinful body and in that body God condemned sin [JB]. He did this in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For the desires of the flesh are death; but the ones of the Spirit are life and peace; since the desires of the flesh are hostile to God, do not submit to God's law; indeed they cannot."

Here St. Paul is not speaking about the body and its concupiscences and the soul in opposition to the body. If this were so, what should be done would be to lash the body so that it would submit to the proper condition and obey. This is not what he means. He says that this man cannot please God. Those who live according to the flesh cannot obey God. It is impossible for them. Speeches are of no use to this man. They make him even more frustrated.

"But you are not in the flesh now."

He is speaking to a community of Romans who have already been baptized.

¹⁰ CCC 422: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5) This is "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1): God has visited his people (see Luke 1:68). He has fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham and his descendants (see Luke 1:55). He acted far beyond all expectation -- he has sent his own "beloved Son" (Mk 1:11).

"You live in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him."

This is why the other day I said: a priest does not belong to God if he does not have the Spirit of God. And this is seen in the facts: the person who has the Holy Spirit loves his enemy, the parish priest, the assistant, the bishop, or whoever.

"But if Christ lives in you, although your body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is alive because of righteousness. IF THE SPIRIT OF HIM WHO RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD DWELLS IN YOU, HE WHO RAISED CHRIST JESUS FROM THE DEAD WILL GIVE LIFE TO YOUR MORTAL BODY THROUGH THE SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN YOU."

Look how wonderful it is: your body is dead because sin does not leave you and you cannot do works of eternal life. You only do works of death: anger, robberies, resentments, rancors, etc. Because of sin your body is already dead and it is dead though you are alive. This is the catechesis of the primitive Church. This is why St. Paul says: Jesus who was dead was raised by the Spirit of God that gives life. If this Spirit lives in you, it will be able to give life to your dead body.

And in what can it be seen? In the fact that you do works of eternal life, of justice; you perform virtue without effort, as St. John Chrysostom says.¹¹ And he ends by saying:

"So then, brethren, we are not debtors in the flesh to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die. BUT IF BY THE SPIRIT YOU PUT TO DEATH THE DEEDS OF THE BODY YOU WILL LIVE."

So, who has the Holy Spirit? He who does works of eternal life (see Jm 2:14-26). He who does not do them, does not have the Spirit of God. Do you know what Tertullian said? "You are not given Baptism in order that you do not sin any more but because already you do not sin." This is why the catechumenate is a time of gestation in which there are scrutinizes to scrutinize people's lives. This is what we will do with you.

¹¹ St. John Chrysostom, *Catechesis II ad illuminandos*, 2; PG 49: 234: "I have said it before, I will say it again now and will not tire of saying it: if someone is not cured of habitual vices and has not begun to exercise virtue with facility, he may not be baptized."

We take account of what the CCC declares: "Every person not yet baptized and only such a person is able to be baptized" (1246). "... The faith required for Baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop..." (1253). "For all the baptized, children or adults, faith must grow after Baptism..." (1254).

VI - ROMANS 10:8-17

Where is this word that we announce? Is it very far away from you? St. Paul says:

"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach. Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is the Lord and BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED. For man believes with his heart and so is justified and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. The scripture says: No one who believes in Him will be put to shame."

What does this mean? If you believe that this vice of masturbation, of drinking, of women, of selfishness, of whatever, if you believe that He will take it away from you, you will not be disappointed. Scripture assures you of this. The person who trusts in Christ will not be disappointed. And if you believe that the eternal life you have been promised, that you will not die, that physical death is a passage to the Father, you will die in peace, because you will not be disappointed.

"FOR EVERYONE WHO CALLS UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED. BUT HOW ARE YOU TO CALL UPON HIM IN WHOM YOU HAVE NOT BELIEVED? AND HOW ARE THEY TO BELIEVE IN HIM OF WHOM THEY HAVE NEVER HEARD? AND HOW ARE THEY TO HEAR WITHOUT ANYBODY TO PREACH? AND HOW CAN MAN PREACH UNLESS THEY ARE SENT? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News." SO, FAITH COMES FROM PREACHING and WHAT IS PREACHED COMES FROM THE WORD OF CHRIST."

This text is very good to see how faith comes from the announcement of the kerygma. Today we believe that faith depends primarily on people being given a lot of bread and the ground being prepared. Here we see that this is not so.

VII - 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-38, 42-27, 54-57

Now we will speak about the passage from Corinthians where it says: "O death, where is your victory? Where is your sting? THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN AND SIN GETS ITS POWER FROM THE LAW."

The evil one relies on the law to seduce man with sin. These readings are very powerful, because the Corinthians were beginning to ask philosophical questions about how the resurrection took place, with which body, with which form, etc. St. Paul has to argue with them.

"But someone will ask: 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish men! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as He has chosen and to each kind of seed its own body."

This about the seed is very important because it is a miracle that a seed can transform itself into an enormous tree that is not at all like the seed. It is something like what happens to us in Christianity: a seed of resurrection is sown in our mortal life that has the power to germinate a glorious body in us.

"So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. Weakness is sown, strength is raised; dishonor is sown, glory is raised. A physical body is sown, a spiritual body is raised. Thus it is written: 'The first man, Adam, a living being; the last Adam, life-giving Spirit'. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical and then the spiritual. The first man from earth is earthly, the second man is from heaven."

This is why Jesus says to Nicodemus: it is necessary to be reborn, to be reborn from above, from heaven (see Jn 3:3).

"When this perishable being puts on the imperishable and this mortal nature puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the same that is written. "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY; DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN and SIN TAKES ITS POWER FROM THE LAW, BUT THANKS BE TO GOD WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST."

NINTH DAYA) CATECHESIS ON THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE¹

Catechism of the Catholic Church: Call to conversion (545,1036, 1428); the conversion of the heart (821, 1425-1433, 1439, 1856, 1888, 2608-2609, 2708); the sacrament of penance (1422-1498).

(Carmen)

This catechesis is for you catechists so that you can have it as a background, as a foundation, that can help you to solve the problems that may arise in the dialogue with the people.

Today I have gathered together ideas I've been glimpsing for a long time and I've made them clear. I can give you a very general panorama of the whole thing.

This vision will be neither exhaustive nor complete because it is an enormously wide theme. Here it is only a question of underlining those points which were particularly emphasized by the renewal of the Second Vatican Council, especially the centrality of the Word of God calls us to conversion in the sacrament of penance and the communitarian dimension of the sacrament which sheds new light on other, more well-known aspects of the sacrament, such as contrition, the confession of sins, satisfaction and the minister of the sacrament.

During the Way, particularly in the penitential celebrations, the Presbyter will have the opportunity to go over and complete all the richness of this sacrament. In addition to this, other important aspects for the understanding of this sacrament will be spoken of at other stages of the Way: the celebration of "Yom Kippur," the Hebrew meaning of "rahamim," "teshuva," etc.

I will speak to you about the SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.² I am

¹ This catechesis, first given in 1972, therefore before the new *Rite of Penance* (1973), the Synod on the sacrament of Reconciliation and the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (1984), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), anticipates and is on the same lines as these documents. When preparing this catechesis, it is very important to read and study the texts mentioned.

² On the names of the sacrament (sacrament of conversion, of penance, of confession, of pardon, of reconciliation):

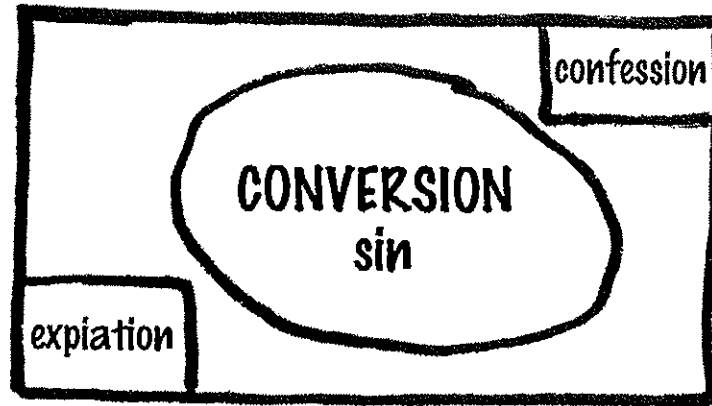
CCC 1423: It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.

It is called the *sacrament of Penance*, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance and satisfaction.

CCC 1424: It is called the *sacrament of confession*, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential

going to write it on the blackboard so that you can see that I am not going to talk about confession only but about the sacrament of penance. These two words, sacrament and penance, are very important because they express a profound content.

Using the image that Fr. Farnés used the other day when speaking about the Eucharist, which is very enlightening, I tell you: imagine that this whole rectangle is the sacrament of penance.



Within this sacrament, this sacramental expression, this penitential sign, there is a part that can be called confession; but confession neither envelops nor exhausts all of the sacrament of penance.

This is just the beginning. We shall see that over the course of history there are certain periods, e.g. from the seventh century to the twelfth, during which people saw the whole sacrament of penance from the point of view of expiation (or satisfaction for sins), which is another component of the sacrament but which does not envelop all of the sacrament. The same thing happened with other partial aspects.

The concept of the sacrament of penance will evolve according to what the people will see in it.

The renewal today wants to go to what is the center of the sacrament of penance, that is what will shed light, so that it can be understood how come, at different periods, one part was emphasized to the detriment of a global vision of the meaning of the sacrament.

element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a "confession"—acknowledgment and praise—of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.

It is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent "pardon and peace."

It is called the *sacrament of reconciliation*, because it imparts to the sinner the life of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God." He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother."

To make you understand what I want to tell you, since you have clearer ideas on the sacrament of the Eucharist, just think that there was a time in which the Eucharist was seen almost exclusively as a sacrifice, so much so that one of the names for the Eucharist was the "Sacrifice of the Mass." The Protestants emphasized another aspect. Today all the research of the renewal is discovering the center of the sacrament and now the Eucharist is fundamentally seen as the Memorial of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the celebration of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The rediscovery of what is the center, the nucleus, of the sacrament of the Eucharist enlightens the other aspects so that some of the conflicts with the Protestants are also being clarified.

This evening we will try to go to the heart of what the sacrament of penance is. At the center of the sacrament of penance (now you will understand why during the catechesis the penitential celebration comes immediately after the kerygma) I do not put words like confession or expiation or anything like that, but at the center we find the word CONVERSION.³

That is, the essence of the sacrament of penance is conversion; and the word conversion always refers directly and exclusively to sin.

The practice of confession today is in very serious crisis. This is why I want to give you some ideas before beginning to speak of the kerygma in conversion, because the sense of sin which society has today, a society which has passed from being an individualistic one to a society more open to a communitarian sense, is such that the forms and ways which were used to explain this sacrament of confession do not respond to the needs of the present age. And since they do not respond to the needs of the age, young people today find confession meaningless with regard to their situation of sin because confession, as it is

³ In this regard we refer to the CCC: the conversion of the baptized (1427-1429); interior penance (1430-1433); the different forms of penance in the Christian life (1434-1439):

CCC 1431: Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace..

CCC 1439: The process of conversion and repentance was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son, the center of which is the merciful father: the fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; the extreme misery in which the son finds himself after squandering his fortune... his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy—all these are characteristic of the process of conversion. The beautiful robe, the ring and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life—pure, worthy and joyful—of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church..

lived today by many people, is a response to a legalistic idea about sin, not to the existential idea which psychology is rediscovering today. It answers to a very individual idea of sin, whereas today communitarian values are being rediscovered. Today, the sense of sin with regard to social life, to professional honesty, to relationships with others, etc., is very much in fashion, whereas the sexual aspect, for example, has passed into second place. This change means that the way we see of the sacrament of penance today, which is confession, does not respond sufficiently to the understanding that humanity has of sin and conversion. This is another reason why the practice of confession is in crisis. Moreover, we shall see now why confession became a devotional practice.

If we go to the sources, to Scripture, to Revelation, we see that the center of the sacrament of penance is conversion. Conversion is the essence of the sacrament and, as I was saying, conversion is related to sin.

Sin in the Scriptures, as can be seen in the catecheses, always has an existential, ontological sense of man's situation on earth. This is how Genesis presents it: a situation of nakedness, of fear, of death (see Gn 3). It never has the legalistic and juridic sense that it acquired later.

The idea of conversion corresponds to this idea of sin as the situation of human nature that is powerless and has fallen into the power of evil (see Rm 7:14-25). Conversion is never a matter of gritting one's teeth, of man making an effort. Throughout Scripture conversion appears as a GIFT FROM GOD, A CALL FROM GOD, AN INITIATIVE TAKEN BY GOD. This idea runs through all the Scriptures. The prophets are nothing other than a powerful voice that gives a Word to the people, calling them to conversion. If you read Isaiah or Jeremiah, you will see how strong this idea is. St. Peter, too, immediately after he has announced Jesus Christ, says: Convert! To call to conversion is not to demand something of people, but to give them the opportunity to be converted, by presenting Jesus Christ to them risen. Since conversion starts from God's initiative, it also needs enlightenment: the radiant sun appears which shows us that we were walking in ways of darkness.

This is why in the Scriptures, the people say: Convert us, Lord, show us the splendor of your countenance so that we may be converted (see Jer 31:18; Ps 80:4). In other words, there is no conversion if God does not appear first. This appearance of God shows man that his ways are twisted and gives him the possibility of starting out on the road of truth and conversion.

To call someone to conversion is not to demand, but to give the opportunity, the possibility, of conversion. We call you to conversion by presenting you with the reality of darkness in which you are, you who have killed Jesus Christ who was God among men. If you take the Gospel of St. Luke, you will see how Jesus Christ is the climax of the manifestation with which God calls humanity to conversion. The whole people of Israel is nothing more than a way in which God calls to conversion men who are submerged by the waters of the universal flood. He gives them the possibility of being converted, of reaching conversion.

This is why St. Luke, after having described one of the apparitions of the risen Christ to the apostles, says: Look at my hands and my feet... (And saying this he showed them his hands and his feet). Then he said to them: These are the words I spoke to you while I was still among you. It was necessary that all that was written about me in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and the Psalms be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures saying to them: Thus it is written that the Christ will have to suffer and will rise from the dead on the third day, in his name conversion for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations (Luke 24:44-47).

Here it can be seen that conversion is an immense gift from God, a fruit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which makes it possible for humanity to be converted. This is why conversion is a work of God. It is not a voluntary effort of man. This is just for starters.

This is why the announcements that you make, calling people to conversion, are always kerygmatic, because they shout out and proclaim conversion, which is the essence of the kerygma.

St. John the Baptist, too, appears as the forerunner of the Messiah, calling men to a conversion of penance.

Before the Church, Israel and all religions had rites for the forgiveness of sins. So that when we say that the primitive Church did not have confession, we are saying that she did not have confession as we have it today, but she did have the essence of the sacrament of penance that is conversion, the forgiveness of sins. Jesus Christ came precisely for this: to forgive sins.

When we say all sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ, we are telling the truth, but let's keep in mind that to be able to receive this forgiveness we first need to be in a spirit of conversion, to have this enlightenment: that you are in sin. That's why conversion starts from God's initiative, which makes you see that you are in sin, this he does by raising up Jesus Christ on the cross in front of the whole world to convince the world of sin, as the Gospels say (see Jn 16:8-9).

We have to keep this in mind; otherwise confusion can arise in the communities. I have heard many catechists say with great emphasis that all sins are forgiven... the entire problem is solved. It is true that all sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ, but who will accept this forgiveness? It's the same as saying: tuberculosis has been cured. But if someone has tuberculosis, he has to undergo a course of treatment and take all the medicines that have been invented. That is, forgiveness of sins must be applied to men. Or it is like saying: the moon has been reached. That's great, but if you want to go to the moon you will have to do certain things to get there. That is, it is a great truth that God has forgiven all sins in his Son Jesus Christ, but it is also true that you have to accept this forgiveness of sins.

And to be able to accept this forgiveness you first have to acknowledge that you are a sinner, which is very, very difficult. This is why God comes to your help, calling you to conversion.

Conversion never has a moralistic or voluntaristic sense,

but, on the contrary, it is essentially a change of mentality, a change of direction. The translation of the Septuagint says in Greek: METANOIA, which means that we were walking in a very confused way on another road, then at a given moment God appears. When he appears, he opens a way. What man has to do then is set off on that way, to seek the face of Yahweh, to change mentality. He was going in one direction; he changes it, looking at the face of God who calls him to his way.

Furthermore, it never has an individualistic sense. In Israel, sin is always the breaking of the covenant that God has made with all the people. This is why you will see instances of individual sin (like in the conquest of Ai after the fall of Jericho, see Jos 7) that have repercussions on the whole community, on the whole people of Israel. This is so true that (because of the hidden sin of just one man, their enemies in Ai defeat them) they have to discover who has broken the covenant if they want to defeat their enemies. Because if only one man breaks the covenant, it is as if the whole people break it. Throughout Scripture there is always a communitarian sense of sin.

Conversion, then, will always be to put oneself in front of God.⁴

Another thing that I want to say before speaking about Jesus Christ: I don't know if you know of a book called: "*Finitude et Culpabilité*" by Ricoeur. It is a difficult book but a very important one because you can see how most of humanity is really alienated, it speaks of the depth that sin has and of the sense of guilt, of being stained, that man has. It makes a whole study of this feeling of guilt in the light of the discoveries of science today. It says that man is a being who is in anguish because of his limitations and because of his inability to express himself. It speaks about the book of Leviticus, which is a book I never understood because of all the details of its prescriptions. It says that in the moment in which this book appears in history, it is a gift of revelation because the whole series of minute prescriptions in Leviticus could not have been conceived without revelation. These prescriptions help man to externally manifest his sense of guilt, which is a very difficult thing to bring to the surface and which stays hidden

⁴ On the inseparability of reconciliation with God and reconciliation with the Church, we note CCC 1440-1445; 1468-1470:

CCC 1440: Sin... at the same time damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (cf LG 11).

CCC 1469: This sacrament reconciles us with the Church. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. The sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it. In this sense it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a revitalizing effect on the life of the Church which suffered from the sin of one of her members (cf I Cor 12:26).

within man who is unable to take it out. It is an immense gift to be able to draw this sense of death out of man. Because to draw out sin is already light, as Jesus Christ says in the catechesis on the blind man. He says to the Pharisees: "Your sin consists in the fact that you say you see. If you were to say that you are blind, you would have no sin" (Jn 9:40-41). That is, to be able to perceive one's own sin is very difficult.

The law does not come to save but to condemn, that is, to make sin obvious. It is not through the law that we are saved because neither the law nor fulfilling the law has the power to save. The law comes only to show us that we are sinners, this is already a great advantage. This will bring us to salvation, to the forgiveness of sins that is in Jesus Christ (see Rm 7:7-13; Gal 3).

See how Pharisaism is the total opposite because it makes salvation consist of the fulfillment of these precepts through our will. That is, people earn salvation instead of being helped by the law to acknowledge themselves as sinners. This is what Jesus denounces in the Pharisees in the catechesis of the blind man.

The essential values of the sacrament of penance are: the situation of existential sin; God who has not remained indifferent but has intervened, taking the initiative, opening a way of salvation and conversion for the people.

In the primitive Church the sins which were considered to be sins of death, particularly serious ones, serious enough to involve exclusion from the community, were apostasy, murder and adultery (sometimes fornication was considered to be the same); that is, to deny the way, to leave the way. Instead the Church considered other sins to be a falling down, the consequence of the feebleness of man who is weak and falls, but without leaving the way: these offer a motivation for conversion. Because the primitive Church considers Baptism to be the beginning of metanoia, the Christian is never a "man who has arrived," but, on the contrary, a man always on a way of conversion, in the sense that he is always looking at God.

For conversion is not only to repent of one's past but above all, to start out on a way forward, towards the future. This is why the primitive Church does not have the examination of conscience at the end of the day but in the morning, when you get up because to be converted is to put yourself in front of God when you begin to walk (see Ps 92:3).

The primitive Church considered sins that did not involve leaving the way as fruit of man's weakness; as typical of the man who is on the way towards the fullness that he doesn't yet have. But he is attracted because he is sure of the fullness and because he is witness to the holiness of God which is absolute.

For the primitive Church, the fundamental sacramental expression of the forgiveness of sin was Baptism. It was very difficult for a baptized person to enter into those sins of death once more. Later, with the frequency of apostasy or other very serious sins, such as murder and adultery, the Church institutionalized public penance.

In the New Testament (see 1 Cor 5:3-5; 1 Tm 1:20) and in

the primitive Church, the first outward expression of what we can call the sacrament of penance for baptized people who had followed the way and then abandoned it is excommunication. Because the Church is not only something juridical, but it is fundamentally sacramental. Penance cannot be understood without a sacramental vision of the Church. If we move on to a markedly juridical vision of the Church, as happens later, penance also takes on, above all, a juridical dimension. The primitive Church is a Body that expresses to the world the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If one of the members commits some sin, that is, denies Jesus Christ, he harms all of humanity because he no longer manifests to mankind the salvation expressed by the Church. This is why, faced with a man who has denied the way, the first thing to do was to excommunicate him.

He leaves the Church, they send him out. This is one of the first external expressions of sin in the primitive Church. Once he is outside, they submit him to penance. You can see this in the letters of St. Paul when he talks about someone who has been handed over to the power of Satan so that he may be converted. Excluding someone from the community is a gift that is given to him to help him to convert. As in the Old Testament, every sin has a social dimension, not only an individual one, so it harms the whole community, the Church, which is a sacrament of salvation for the world. So, as a sign of this sin, there is exclusion from the community. The *Shepherd of Hermas* sees the Church as a tower and says he will go away from the tower but not far. And the forgiveness of someone's sins is expressed by allowing them to be readmitted to the community, to the assembly, to the Eucharist.

This is the first expression in the primitive Church of the penitential sacrament. But this is very rare, that is, it is only for very grave things, so that this Sacrament is seen as a second Baptism.⁵ Since the important thing is not only the absolution but, above all, that the person has a true interior conversion, this period will be long; it will last until he is ready to receive forgiveness. Because even if it rains a lot, if you do not collect the rain, it is of no use to you. In the same way, even if there is a lot of forgiveness, but you do not have interior conversion, it is of no use to you. In the catechumenate, the Church considers conversion as a long gestation by means of exorcisms, scrutinies, etc. Over a long period of time the Church gestates conversion in the catechumen without ever considering conversion as something that you gain through your own efforts, but as a gift, a work that God carries out by means of the Church. The conversion of the penitent depends on the prayer of the Church and on the gestation toward conversion that is taking place again in him. Because what is fundamental in this exclusion of the penitent is the communitarian participation of the Church. The community is very concerned for the penitent. That is, the essential value of the sacrament of penance at this time is the communitarian and

⁵ On the relation between the sacrament of Reconciliation and Baptism, see CCC: why have a sacrament of Reconciliation after Baptism? (1425-1426); conversion of the baptized (1427-1429).

ecclesial value because it is the Church who gestates and leads to conversion. They used to pray a lot for the penitents and took particular care of them. As a sign of the fact that they were forgiven, they were readmitted to the community.

In the third century controversies about penance begin with an increase in apostasies. Here we find a penitential institution, which, however, is not yet called a sacrament or anything like that. All the studies being done today on the sacrament of penance - it is not easy to follow the thread of how this practice evolved in the Church, not just in its external manifestation but also in its essential pulse - confirm what I am saying to you with certainty, even if there are still some things which are doubtful and which are being investigated. In the third century we already have a penitential institution in which there are three essential elements:

1) The Church, gathered together with her president who is usually the bishop, calls sinners to conversion, to penitence, by making them leave the assembly. This is why the institution of penance is said to be public, because that's what it is, because it is a celebration of the community, not because the sinner says his sins in public, there is a lot of confusion about this. It is public because it is a liturgical act. There is a symbolic expulsion accompanied by the prayers of the community and the penitential garment is given.

2) The Church looks after the sinners. This is another reason why the penitential institution is public, because the whole Church takes on the responsibility. The sinner does not even say his sins in public because everybody knows his sins. We shall see later on how this point will develop. It is public because of the fact that the whole Church makes the sign, in the presence of the whole community; the bishop gives the penitential garment and the ashes and sends the sinners out. It is because the whole Church is concerned about the penitent.

This is where there is a similarity with the catechumenate because there, in the same way, the Church takes the responsibility and gestates. This is why I say that conversion is not a fruit of our efforts but is a gift of God.

During the penitential stage, which is long, there is great concern for the penitents. They are not totally excluded from the community. They can take part in all the liturgical meetings except the Eucharist; they have a special place, that is, that of the penitents. You can find many very old prayers of the Church that pray for the Order of Penitents. To enter the Order of Penitents was already a concession. Clerics were not allowed to enter but were deprived of their office and ceased to be clerics.

3) Holy Thursday is the day of reconciliation, the bishop, in the presence of all the people, welcomes the penitents back. You see how this type of penance is always communitarian. It is not public because they confess their sins publicly but in virtue of an ecclesial dimension. The sins were always so serious that they were already known and were a scandal for everyone. This is why there is a public act to make reparation for a public scandal that the Church has given the world. So you

see the reason for this communitarian and social dimension.

In the third century Tertullian, who is very rigorous, has a lot of influence, they began to lay down various penitential interdicts (prohibitions) that are very severe. For example, those who hold public office have to give it up, the same for political or military offices. Clerics were downgraded. Thus the penitents enter a social context that marks them for the rest of their lives.

This went on to become so rigorous that reconciliation with the community is not granted to penitents unless they are in danger of death, at the last moment. You can see this in some writings of St. Augustine. Because in this period, public penance is not only a way to forgive sins but also a pedagogical way with which the Church brings sinners to conversion. This is only so for very serious sins against the community so that the person is given a way to return to the community.

Fr. Farnés says that a quotation from a document in the archives of Tarragon is very enlightening on this point: a priest asks his bishop if he can grant penance to a man at the point of death, that is, if that person can enter the Order of Penitents. And the bishop answers him: No. Give him the viaticum. This is incomprehensible for our mentality. How can you give a person the viaticum if he does not go to confession beforehand? This means that the Order of Penitents was so rigorous that a sick person could not enter it, so the Bishop says that the forgiveness of sins may be given to him in another way: with the viaticum.

From the fourth century onwards we see an evolution in the practice of penance, which, however, doesn't lose sight of the essential elements.

Just think that we are now moving away from a poor and persecuted Church, in which each baptized person has gone through a long catechumenal process with a very serious baptism, to a Church of the masses. Baptism ceases to be the culmination of the process of conversion and baptisms are given more easily. This is so true that Gregory of Tours says later on that the vices of the barbarians are not left in the baptismal pool. So now imagine a Christianity without true conversion, without having really had a meeting with Jesus Christ. Baptism was given en masse, more as a sign of loyalty to a leader than of conversion to God, it hardly affected people's lives. Now, since there is a tendency to reduce baptism to an exterior fact and conversion to God is no longer central, we increasingly see a radical change in the penitential praxis.

Before this, public penance had been very rigorous because it corresponded to conversion and to baptism as in the primitive Church. Now there begins to appear a Church that is a mass of people that is converted very little. Parallel to this, as a reply to this Church of the masses, monasticism develops.

All this brings a new form of the praxis of penance (from the fifth to the ninth century).

The monks, who are the great missionaries of northern Europe, have a great influence on the evolution of penance. They want to bring conversion to the people. Since the people sin

often, it is necessary to forgive them in a way that is more manageable than the old praxis of public penance. The missionary monks, particularly the Irish, introduce the practice of private penance. The sacrament of penance now takes place between penitent and priest in a more secret way, with the possibility of being repeated frequently. So gradually we arrive at the disappearance of public penance and the appearance of the private and frequent practice of the sacrament.

During this period, too, the mentality of Germanic law enters, sin begins to be seen, above all, as something legalistic, the breaking of a series of precepts. Now the forgiveness of sins does not come through a way of conversion but through expiation or satisfaction, for sins.

Lists of sins with their corresponding expiations begin to appear. For a sin to be forgiven, you need to make an adequate expiation: for each particular sin, a particular expiation.

Thus a strongly legalistic view of sin and forgiveness appears. Who is in charge of taxing the sin with its corresponding expiation? The penitentiary monks.

This is what is called tariff confession. Penitential tariffs appear. It is very interesting to see the list of expiations.

The first penitential, the oldest one, probably dates from the sixth century. Now it becomes necessary to tell your sins to the priest; the confession of sin. However, at this time the confession of sins is still not essential and is only a way of calculating the expiation because, if you do not tell the monk your sins, he does not know what expiation to give you. The essential thing is expiation. The Germans introduce a very strong individualistic accent together with the legalistic sense. What is important is personal salvation, and in order to get it one has to do a lot of expiation.

Great fasts and penances start to appear. For fear of being lax, a new rigorism in tariffs and expiations is imposed so that the moment arrives in which a sinner has to do so many expiations, that in his whole life he does not have the material time to bring them to a completion. So, vicarious expiations appear.

Almsgiving is used as a form of satisfaction. At the same time, the great expiatory power of the Mass is discovered. Private Masses multiply. The Mass is transformed into a very valid means of expiation. Gradually, the abuses increase to the extent that a rich man can pay for his personal salvation by having Masses said for the expiation of his sins.

(Kiko)

In addition to this, a rich man could pay a poor man to do penance instead of him. One of the tariffs, for example, was to abstain from the conjugal act for a certain length of time.

(Carmen)

Indulgences, too, become valuable as expiation for sin.⁶

There were attempts to reform all these abuses. One example is the Third Council of Toledo in the year 589, in which they want to return to the public penance of the primitive Church because the current situation is disastrous.

Just think, the value of the president who excludes and welcomes back the penitents in the name of the assembly is already lost. Now there is only the monk, who is a mere intermediary with the task of giving suitable penances. The monk is a kind of spiritual director who tells you the expiations you have to do. The sense of the forgiveness of sins in a liturgical assembly of the whole community presided over by the bishop has been lost. We have moved on to a practice in which it is almost the sinner who forgives himself his own sins through a series of expiations. This is so true that he almost does not even need absolution, the intervention of the Church that forgives the sins in the name of Jesus Christ. Once the penitent has expiated his sins quantitatively, they are forgiven him.

The Third Council of Toledo wants to go back to public penance, to give penance the ecclesial dimension that has been lost. Because confession has been transformed into something private that one has to do, in which one tells one's sins to the monk so that he can impose an expiation according to the tariff. In place of the penitential process, the confession of sins begins to appear, even if it is not yet essential; expiation is. This gives rise to a whole series of abuses, since expiation can be compensated by almsgiving, Masses and fasting.

In 813 there is an attempt to restore the primitive practice of public penance and to abolish all the penitentials. But now that the sense that the catechumenate used to have of descending to the reality of sin and conversion has been lost, there is a legalistic sense instead, so the renewal is expressed only in an exterior rigor. So the bishop, who was a great temporal authority, a great feudal lord, excommunicates and imposes great burdens on the sinners. Many people would obey, not because of an interior conversion, but because the bishop has great secular power and can even have them killed. Penitence is very far from the sense it had in the primitive Church, the sense of ecclesiality and of gestation on the part of the Church, of the conversion of the penitent. Since none of this can be maintained, they go back to the practice of private confession.⁷

⁶ On the doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church, closely connected with the effects of the sacrament of Penance, see CCC 1471-1479.

⁷ In this connection, bear in mind that the sacrament of Reconciliation with individual confession and absolution, whether or not it is carried out in a communitarian form, "is always, by its very nature, a liturgical action, therefore an ecclesial and public action" (CCC 1482). "Following the suggestions of the Second Vatican Council, the *Ordo Paenitentiae* provided three rites which, while always keeping intact the

In the tenth century, penance, like the Eucharist, achieves its maximum point of decadence. This century is considered to be the most decadent in the history of the Church.

From the eleventh century onwards, expiation loses the value it had had because the confession of sins begins to be regarded as the greatest expiation. Confession of sins, because of the humiliation that it involves and the shame felt when doing it, begins to take on a sense of expiation. Now we enter a period in which the confession of sins is the center of penance.

This can already be clearly seen in the twelfth century. Ideologies about the expiatory sense of the confession of sins appear. So, what is asserted as the central point of penance is the confession of sins. The more you humiliate and shame yourself by going into details when confessing sins, the more expiation you do. In this way, confession becomes a confession of devotion. Now you don't only confess mortal sins but any stupid little thing because what has value is to confess.

There are attempts at renewal, but as the sources have already been lost from sight, all the reforms that they want to carry out always lack direction because they no longer have the sources of the catechumenate and Judaism before their eyes. Then theories appear that are attempts to adjust things, but they do not manage to achieve a profound renewal. What is required is that people are sincere and confess more frequently.

In the twelfth century, the confession of sins becomes important and, with it, absolution for forgiveness. Look how in the primitive Church, before this forgiveness, there was a long period in which the Church gestated the conversion of the penitent; the forgiveness of sins was not only an absolution but also a reconciliation with the whole community through the sign of being readmitted into the assembly in a liturgical, ecclesial act.

In the East, even if there is a similar evolution with regard to penance, also due to the intervention of the monks,

essential elements, make it possible to adapt the celebration of the sacrament of penance to particular pastoral circumstances.

The first form - reconciliation of individual penitents is the only normal and ordinary way of celebrating the sacrament, it cannot and must not be allowed to fall into disuse or be neglected. The second form-reconciliation of a number of penitents with individual confession and absolution-even though in the preparatory acts it helps to give greater emphasis to the community aspects of the sacrament, is the same as the first form in the culminating sacramental act, namely individual confession and individual absolution of sins. It can thus be regarded as equal to the first form as regards the normality of the rite. The third form however - reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution-is exceptional in character. It is therefore not left to free choice but is regulated by a special discipline" (*Reconciliation & Penance*, 32). "Personal confession is thus the form most expressive of reconciliation with God and with the Church" (CCC 1484), whether or not it is carried out within a community celebration.

there is not, however, a detailed confession of sins. The person who goes to confession kneels down and simply says: I am a sinner. Then they give him a time to fast and enter into conversion. Then he comes back, they give him absolution.

Some degenerations are due to the loss of the community dimension of the Church as sacrament. The Church is now seen as a juridical center where people come to be saved. In the measure that the fundamental aspect of the community is lost, penance tends to be lived in an individualistic way. In addition to this, there appears the medicinal value of the interrogation by the monk. The Eastern Church is a bit more spiritual, but the West, with its psychological-juridical sense of things, wants to deepen the conversion of the penitent. Thus the examination appears: how, in what way, how many times, etc., because of the medicinal value of the inquiry about the sins, which has more value than the confession itself made by the penitent. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) imposes on the faithful the obligation to confess once a year.

The Franciscans and the Dominicans take the practice of private confession everywhere. The practice of very frequent confessions appears; quite the opposite of penance in the primitive Church.

And so we arrive at the Council of Trent.

The Council of Trent fixes the conditions for the validity of the penitent's absolution: examination of conscience, contrition, resolve not to sin again, confession and satisfaction.⁸ The use of confessional boxes spreads, making it very recent. The need for confessionals arises when the practice of private confession becomes widespread. The spread of the confessional box, with details like the grille, etc., was due particularly to St. Charles Borromeo. In this way, confession as a means of personal sanctification and also spiritual direction becomes part of the way of perfection.

The sacraments have two elements: one, in the case of penance, is to be the visible sign that helps man to receive forgiveness, the other is that the sacrament is an efficacious sign because it gives the forgiveness that it signifies. This is obvious. You can be given many absolutions, but if you are not prepared interiorly, they are of no value to you. Fr. Farnés always illustrates this point with the example of the bucket. You can collect grace like rain with a bucket, so you get some; or you can collect it with a colander, you are left with nothing. However the sacrament has an efficacious value of grace and forgiveness, if man is not prepared internally to receive it, it is of no use. The sacrament of penance can have an awful lot of grace, but if you do not receive it in a disposition of interior conversion, none of your sins are forgiven.

This is why the first of the two values that the sacrament has is that the sacrament itself, as a sign, has the power of connecting with what is human, of preparing man to receive this forgiveness that is efficacious.

⁸ Regarding penitential acts (contrition, confession of sins, satisfaction), see CCC 1450-1460.

Luther, who had a certain basis for underlining the importance of the sign, exaggerated this aspect to the point of denying the efficacy of the sacrament in itself.

It is possible, however, to also fall into the opposite exaggeration: to underline the efficacy of the sacrament and neglect the value of the signs. It is true that, for the efficacy of the sacrament, it is the same whether one communicates with bread or with a host that looks more like paper than bread, or whether only the priest or everyone drinks the wine, because essentially the sacrament is being fulfilled just the same. However, those signs that have been indicated by the Church as expressing the sacramental reality more clearly must be chosen. In fact, they "can foster active and full participation and serve the spiritual well-being of the faithful" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 5).

In the case of penance, with regard to the forgiveness of sins, if the efficacy of the absolution is emphasized too much, there is a risk of it acquiring a magical sense, as if it were enough by itself to forgive sins. Confess your sins, receive absolution and you are at peace.

From the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries nothing changes.⁹

This is how we have lived confession: with the emphasis on the absolute efficacy of the sacrament, the value of the sign, which is what makes you able to receive this forgiveness, disappears from view. This becomes something secondary. In the foreground, as something essential, is left the simple confession of sins and reception of absolution. Confession becomes something magical or private. This perception has lasted

⁹ For a synthesis of the history of the sacrament of Penance see CCC 1446-1449:

CCC 1447: Over the centuries the concrete form in which the Church has exercised this power received from the Lord has varied considerably. During the first centuries the reconciliation of Christians who had committed particularly grave sins after their Baptism (for example, idolatry, murder or adultery) was tied to a very rigorous discipline, according to which penitents had to do public penance for their sins, often for years, before receiving reconciliation. To this "order of penitents" (which concerned only certain grave sins), one was only rarely admitted and in certain regions only once in a lifetime. During the seventh century Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the "private" practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest. This new practice envisioned the possibility of repetition and so opened the way to a regular frequenting of this sacrament. It allowed the forgiveness of grave sins and venial sins to be integrated into one sacramental celebration. In its main lines this is the form of penance that the Church has practiced down to our day.

to the present day. A legalistic view of sin has come down to us in which the interior disposition does not matter much, but what is important is to confess externally and in detail all sins of every type. It is an individualistic view of sin. It is an "isolated" priest who forgives your sins, and the Church as a community hardly appears.

Now you can understand why this practice today is in total crisis and why we call it "confession." The penitential and the sacramental processes can hardly be seen. For this reason, also because humanity today is moving towards a social and communitarian view of sin and away from a legalistic and individualistic one, you can understand why the practice of confession is in crisis. This is why many people happily go to communion without first going to confession.

GUIDELINES FOR RENEWAL¹⁰

Do not think that renewal is easy. Many people think that, since personal confession is hateful, the ideal would be to have general absolution. Many innovators have thought this. And do not think that this would be something new because, during the war, Pius XII granted the power to give general absolution to

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 30: "The practice of this Sacrament, as regards its celebration and form, has undergone a long process of development, as is attested to by the most ancient sacramentaries, the documents of Councils and Episcopal Synods, the preaching of the Fathers and the teaching of the Doctors of the Church. But with regard to the substance of the Sacrament there has always remained firm and unchanged in the consciousness of the Church the certainty that, by the will of Christ, forgiveness is offered to each individual by means of sacramental absolution given by the ministers of Penance. It is a certainty reaffirmed with particular vigor both by the Council of Trent [173] and by the Second Vatican Council: "Those who approach the Sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's Mercy for the offences committed against him, are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example and by prayer works for their conversion" [LG 11]. And as an essential element of faith concerning the value and purpose of Penance it must be reaffirmed that our Savior Jesus Christ instituted in his Church the Sacrament of Penance so that the faithful who have fallen into sin after Baptism might receive grace and be reconciled with God.

The Church's faith in this Sacrament involves certain other fundamental truths which cannot be disregarded. The sacramental rite of Penance, in its evolution and variation of actual forms, has always preserved and highlighted these truths. When it recommended a reform of this rite, the Second Vatican Council intended to ensure that it would express those truths even more clearly, [176] and this has come about with the new Rite of Penance. For the latter has made its own the whole of the teaching brought together by the Council of Trent, transferring it from its particular historical context (that of a resolute effort to clarify doctrine in the face of the serious deviations from the Church's genuine teaching), in order to translate it faithfully into terms more in keeping with the context of our own time."

CCC 1448: Beneath the changes in discipline and celebration that this sacrament has undergone over the centuries, the same fundamental structure is to be discerned. It comprises two equally essential elements: on the one hand, the acts of the man who undergoes conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit: namely, contrition, confession and satisfaction; on the other, God's action through the intervention of the Church. The Church, who through the bishop and his priests forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ and determines the manner of satisfaction, also prays for the sinner and does penance with him. Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion.

all the soldiers. The great liturgists say thank goodness that this did not become established because it would have completely destroyed penance, making it even more magical. The value of the rite is not only in the absolution, since through Jesus Christ we have already been forgiven, but in making man able to receive forgiveness, which is what the catechumenal process and the penitential process of the primitive Church aimed at.

Many also believe, with a very "Cursillista" communitarian sense, that the value of the renewal lies in stating your sins publicly, in having the courage to say in front of the brothers and sisters: I am an adulterer and a fornicator..., but this is not right either. This would be to give even more importance to the confession of sins as expiation. We have already seen that, in the primitive Church, penance was public, not because sins were stated publicly, but because it was an event involving the whole Church, the whole community, because all the Church took part.

So, what are the guidelines for renewal?

First of all, we have seen that conversion arises from the initiative of God who calls to conversion by revealing his face. So, the first thing to do is to bring to the foreground God who calls to conversion, that is, to put the Word of God which calls to conversion in the first place. This is why penitential celebrations recover this sense by bringing God to the foreground: it is the Word that calls to conversion, which has the power to call the community to conversion. The Church must present herself as a community in conversion, as the primitive Church was, where people did not think that they had already arrived or were perfect. This is something that is born from legalism, with a new way of seeing the priest and the Church. On the contrary, the Church demonstrates the strength and the power of God who acts in her by acknowledging her weaknesses and feeling herself to be a people walking in a path of conversion. So these penitential celebrations have the value of restoring, as the first thing, the Word of God that calls to conversion.

Secondly, the assembly must be recovered, the Church which confesses herself to be a sinner.

Thirdly, the sense of the presbyter as the head of this Church must be recovered.

Fourthly, in the absolution of the penitent the gesture of the laying on of hands, the sign through which, in former times, the bishop administered the divine pardon and reintegrated the penitent fully into the life of the community, must be recovered.

Finally, the importance of the sign of peace must be recovered: you feel forgiven deep inside you when you feel in communion with your brothers and sisters. This is why the embrace of peace is important. You will see that, when you are not at peace, since sin is communitarian, however hidden your sin may be, you do not feel that you are in communion with the brothers and sisters. To recover communion with the brothers and sisters is the greatest sign of forgiveness, of the fact that you have really been reconciled.

The Church wants to have penitential celebrations in which

the Word is proclaimed and addressed to man. Because those confessions of spiritual direction, of giving little bits of advice, that we used to have, arose when the Word of God that guides man disappeared. Spiritual direction certainly has its value, but it cannot be confused with the celebration of penance. The Word responds to the many problems that before we solved with spiritual direction, it helps us to acknowledge ourselves as sinners.¹¹

What we are doing is recovering these values of the sacrament of penance little by little, by having community celebrations of penance with individual confession and absolution.¹²

In the history of this sacrament, as in all of them, it can be seen how the sacraments have always been something alive, never static. The essence remains, but the external expressions vary. This is why the reform does not consist of returning to the forms of the primitive Church but in keeping the spirit of the sacrament, its nucleus and its center, while adjusting its expression so that it is in harmony with the present moment, so that expressions can be found which sacramentally express the forgiveness of sins and which fulfill it; that is, so that the people can feel forgiven, can feel themselves in peace. Everything proceeds in evolution.

In rediscovering baptism as a way of conversion for the forgiveness of sins and reliving it in a catechumenal way, we will also recover the center of the sacrament of penance.

THAT'S WHY THE TRUE RENEWAL OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE WILL COME WITH THE REDISCOVERY OF THE CATECHUMENATE AND THE RECOVERY OF THE TRUE VALUE OF BAPTISM. In this way we will also recover the signs of the sacrament of penance.

(Kiko)

I hope that what Carmen has said will be as useful to you as it has been to me.

(Carmen)

When Kiko spoke to the people during the Questionnaire on Penance, it was incomplete; we could not see how to tackle the problem. Then when I saw the enormous number of problems the people have with regard to this sacrament, I saw the necessity of doing something more thorough.

I can indicate some articles that can help you:

¹¹ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 32: "Thanks then to its individual character, the first form of celebration makes it possible to link the Sacrament of Penance with something which is different but readily linked with it: I am referring to *spiritual direction*."

¹² With regard to the forms in which the sacrament of penance may be celebrated, provided for in the *Rite of Penance*, refer to: John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 32, (quoted above in note 7).

- *PHASE* No. 37, 1967: "Hacia una renovación del sacramento de la penitencia" ("Towards a renewal of the sacrament of penance"). In this review there are many articles, including one of an historical kind dealing with the evolution of the sacrament.
- *CONCILIUM* No. 61: "La administración sacramental de la reconciliación" ("The sacramental administration of reconciliation").
- *CONCILIUM* No. 72: "El perdón de los pecados" ("The forgiveness of sins"). This article shows the loss of the communitarian sense in the liturgy. It examines it under three aspects: Eucharist, Penance and Holy Orders. For example, it says that the priest's sense of service to the assembly, to the community, was lost; his ministry became the privilege of one who says his Mass for his personal sanctification. In the first centuries this was inconceivable. In the Middle Ages there were priests who were ordained to say Masses in the chapels of the nobility or the kings. The primitive Church, for which a presbyter without a community was unthinkable, would have thought them very strange: a head without a body.

With the appearance of the ecclesial community, there will also reappear communitarian penance. What is fundamental is to create the community and, to achieve this, the catechumenal process.

(Kiko)

I think that what Carmen has said will have given you the same joy as it has given me. And it is to see how God has given us this way because the true renewal of penance will arise from the renewal of baptism. When the catechumenate has been renewed in the Church, you will see that the sense of penance will be revealed because penance is like a "second baptism." For, in this sense, the primitive Church took the catechumenate as a model for the order of penitents. This is why to renew the catechumenate is ultimately to renew penance. Perhaps, too, in our communities, as in the primitive Church, there will arise in the future the problem of a brother or sister in the community who commits a serious public sin.

(Carmen)

I already discovered this in the shantytowns. I was impressed at how Julianita, who for a long time was in the community of Palomeras and had very little education but who often said some very inspired things, one day must have done something which the others saw her do, left the community. One day, I met her and asked: Why don't you come to the community? And she said: Not until they forgive me in the community for what I have done...

See how this woman who had never been to confession had understood that she had harmed the community and that she needed

to be reconciled with the community to feel forgiven. She felt that she was a sinner and wanted to confess her fault.

In the communities we see cases like that of adultery, where whoever has done it excludes himself from the community without anybody saying anything to him. In Rome there was the case of a man who excluded himself from the community. The community prayed a lot for him and called him to conversion. Now he is back in the community. You see how a centuries old practice of the Church reappears.

(Kiko)

We will have to see about this. There are occasions in which excluding a brother from the community for a period of time is seen as being necessary to make him enter into conversion.

B) QUESTIONNAIRE ON PENANCE

The first thing to do is to teach some songs; you have to begin to practice the songs for the penitential celebration so that it will be a real liturgy in which the assembly sings. In the penitential celebration you sing "He Rose From Death" which they already know. You need to teach the refrain of the song, "If You Feel a Breeze From Heaven." Someone must learn the cantor's part. You need to teach, "Towards You, Holy City" and "The March is Hard," as well. Don't give the people any booklets with the songs or duplicated sheets with the words. This is awful. When people start to sing something they ask: what page it is on, this breaks the thread of the celebration. It's better to teach the people the refrain so they know it by heart and for a cantor to sing the verses.

(Carmen)

If the song is long, people can't learn all the words by heart, so they don't sing. And so the liturgy is very poor and people don't participate. Instead, if they learn the refrain well, that's enough because the people all sing and sing with strength.

(Kiko)

You can dictate the questionnaire or give out copies. The former is better, if you can manage it. When you have taught the songs, give the questionnaire out to everyone and read it aloud so that points can be clarified as necessary. The questionnaire has an introduction.

INTRODUCTION

We all need a general pedagogy that can lead us to the conviction that there are no human acts which are not at the same time social acts, that is, they either build up or destroy the community. There is no sin without damage to the community.

The commandment of Jesus is unique and has three dimensions: God, my neighbor and myself. This needs to be insisted upon because the only way that certain sins can be considered to be sins is by taking into account the communitarian character of all human reality. Depth psychology tells us that everything in man, even his innermost desires, affects his behavior and therefore his relationships with other people.

Well then, how can we bring the brothers and sisters to acknowledge this mentality? Apart from numerous signs of our times which begin to point in this direction, it is necessary to return to the biblical sources. In the Old Testament there is no sin that is not a sin against the

Covenant between God and the people. Nevertheless, we cannot forget the difficulties, since we are rooted in an individualistic education.

Here you should make this point clear. So that the people understand that in the Old Testament there is no sin that is not against the Covenant between God and his people, you can tell the story of Ai (see Jos 7), about which Carmen was speaking. When the people took Jericho, God commanded them to put everything under the ban and destroy it and to take nothing for themselves. But there was one man, Achan, who disobeyed God and stole some valuable items and a purple cloak and hid them under his tent without anyone noticing. You know that the Covenant of God with the people consists of the fact that God will make them defeat all their enemies if they keep his commandments. But it happens that in the next battle, to take the city of Ai, they are defeated and many die. So they think: God is no longer with us. Joshua prays to Yahweh, Yahweh tells him that his people have broken the Covenant because they have taken something that was forbidden. So, drawing lots, the people discover the guilty one, who confesses his sin and is stoned to death. Then they defeat the inhabitants of Ai.

You see how a hidden sin falls on all the people. The same thing happens in the Church. If in a community one person commits a sin, he harms not only himself, but also the community and the whole world. He harms the community because the latter is not carrying out the mission to be the sacrament of salvation for the world. And he harms the world because it does not see the light, since the Church, in one of her members, is not fulfilling her mission.

Then you read the questions, without too much explanation so as not to create problems at the beginning. You choose secretaries for the groups and send the groups to other rooms or to a corner of the same room. Give the group forty-five minutes at the most to answer the questions. The secretary should write down the different answers of the people in his group. There should be six or seven people in each group.

Then you all meet again and listen to the answers of each group. You read the question, the secretaries answer in turn. Then you give the answer to the question, you repeat this for all the questions.

First question: Can you offend God without at the same time offending your neighbor and yourself?

Some people will say that you cannot offend God alone because we are the Mystical Body and so the sin of one person has repercussions on others. But the question has a trick in it. It asks if we can only offend God. The question is put in this way to make us understand that we have a concept of sin that is only vertical and individualistic, as if sin were only about the relationship between God and me and consisted of an offense against God in himself, taking something away from what God is.

Basically, we think we can harm God in himself.

The first thing that we must understand is that we cannot harm God. You cannot offend God in the sense of harming his nature because then God would be vulnerable, he would not be God. God is invulnerable. Scripture says this: Those who draw their bows against the heavens... do they think they can reach me? Don't they know that the arrow falls back on them? (See Ps 7:17; Jb 35:5-8; Jer 7:18-19; Si 27:25)

This is something which surprises people a lot because when we were little we were told that when we are bad and naughty we make Baby Jesus suffer. And we still have these very infantile and sentimental ideas about sin making Jesus cry.

In what sense can we talk about an offense against God? In the sense that sin breaks God's plan for us.¹³ What is God's plan, God's design for man? Love. Sin always damages the love of God for us.

Moreover every sin, even a blasphemy that I say without anyone knowing about it, degrades me as a person inside. This degradation has repercussions in my relationships with other people; in some way it destroys the others. This is also what depth psychology says: that when someone is angry, for example, because he quarreled with someone on the bus who stepped on his foot, then he will take it out on his wife at home. If you have a problem that embitters you, your relationships with other people are different from when you are happy. Even a wicked thought conditions your attitudes toward others. If you harbor something morbid, something deeply degrading, you are breaking God's plan. In this sense we can speak of offending against God, in that we break God's plan for man.

So when you sin, you offend God in the sense that you break God's plan, so you harm yourself and others. So it is impossible to offend God without at the same time offending yourself and other people.

People think that sin is something good which is forbidden, when in reality sin is a misfortune, a cancer, which harms the person who commits it. It is not that you commit something against an abstract law; it is that you enter into death. God told Adam not to sin, not because sin annoys him, but because if Adam sins, he dies, God does not want Adam to die. But Adam sins, he dies. He breaks the plan that God had established for him and his life becomes hell. Work becomes unbearable. For a woman, childbearing becomes something very painful. Egotism appears, etc. You must make it clear that we have here a different concept of sin. It is very difficult to make the

¹³ CCC 1850: Sin is an offence against God: "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, done that which is evil in your sight" (Ps 51:4). Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become "like gods" (Gen 3:5), knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is thus "love of oneself even to contempt of God" (St. Augustine). In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation (Phil 2:6-9).

people you have in front of you pass from one concept of sin to another. People think that sin is something nice, something that you like, but that you are not allowed to do it because it offends God. So of course people think that whoever sins a lot has a wonderful time down here, but he is going to be punished... Nevertheless, nobody is going to take away from him what he has enjoyed here, with his three mistresses, going from orgy to orgy.

This is what people think. This concept of sin is anti-biblical. People think like the queen in a story who, when she ate an ice cream, said: To eat ice cream is wonderful, but if it were a sin, it would be even better because it would be even more attractive...

Sin is an evil for the one who commits it because, with it, he enters into death.

(Carmen)

Sin breaks the plan of salvation God has for the world, which is the Church. In this sense, the Christian who sins always sins against the Church. The evil then spreads throughout the world, but not in the mechanical sense of a system of communicating vessels, as a lot of people say, but in the sacramental sense.

(Kiko)

Second question: In what actions of your daily life do you most show your individualism?

With this question we want to get the people to think a little about themselves. People usually say vague, general things, not anything concrete. So you must ask them to be concrete: in which acts... And in this way, somehow they are able to acknowledge that they are sinners. This is important for the penitential celebration that will take place at the next meeting.

You must see if people consider themselves to be sinners. In the question we use the word individualism in the sense of egotism, of thinking only about ourselves, without other people entering into our plans in any way. With this question people face their own sins a little bit.

If we were to ask what big sins they commit, no one would say a word. On the contrary, with this question we can see that we are selfish in everything, when eating, at work, at leisure, etc. You get home and sit in front of the television or read the newspaper without taking the least bit of notice of your wife. You are always number one. We always have this individualistic attitude that shows that, at a deep level, we exist for ourselves and consider others to be at our personal service.

Third Question: Consider whether you think about confession as something individualistic. Do you go to purify yourself

alone? How often when you have sinned have you feared its consequences on others and especially on the community?

Here the people usually reply sincerely and say: I have always confessed in an individualistic way. I have never worried about the consequences of my sin on others. As for the community... I just do not see it anywhere.

This questionnaire is a catechesis because it wants to teach something, to give something. The questions themselves are already teaching something. This question itself tells people that confession should not only be something individual.

Something very interesting happens: people, even those who have a deeper social and community sense, always go to confession with the idea of purifying themselves alone, because we have made confession into an act that is very much one of natural religiosity, in the sense that what interests us is to pacify our consciences. Do you go to confession really thinking that with your sin you are destroying your community, the Church, other people, or do you go to confession stained, without peace, because otherwise you do not go to the cinema happy? Are you not perhaps seeking only your personal well-being, in which other people don't enter into the picture at all?

Here we should all say a general *mea culpa* because we are always worried about our own petty personal salvation, we are afraid. And so going to confession, we feel at peace.

Private confession has left a mark on us in this sense. Perhaps many people now come to the communities who have never been to confession, who have never thought confession was a good thing. In this sense, these people are more genuine, not having been immunized.

(Carmen)

Sometimes, with your wrong attitude, you can cause the degeneration of the great gift of God that is confession; you confess your sins as if they were simply isolated infractions of a law, but you don't really recognize yourself as a sinner in need of a real and authentic conversion. So maybe you confess that you have stolen something, but you don't change jobs. The primitive Church's conception of penance and the situation of sin was different: people even changed their jobs if it was necessary. Conversion really had something to do with life.

(Kiko)

Don't go into too much detail about this with the people because this can create never-ending discussions. If you only touch confession a little bit, some people react immediately. We are all very resistant to change; we think that if there have been abuses, religion is not true.

(Carmen)

God allows you to commit sins so that you can really

discover your reality, like pimples that appear and tell you that there is something wrong under the surface. This is the positive aspect of sin. This is why there was the law, to make sin manifest.

(Kiko)

Fourth Question: For you, to what extent does the priest who absolves you represent the community?¹⁴

Here people say that they have never thought about this. We think that the priest only represents God or Jesus Christ. But the community... what community?

So I explain this a little by talking about the primitive Church. When a brother sinned seriously and publicly, he wounded not only himself, but also the whole community, because the community is a sign before the whole world. So the community would exclude him for a certain period of time to call him to conversion, he would be sent to do penance and fast. This can be understood very well in the catechumenate, in which we, in the name of the Church, are gestating you, teaching you to pray, to fast, we ask for signs of conversion.

When a brother realized that he had been able to destroy his baptism by sinning grievously - after he had been given power through the Holy Spirit not to sin, after having really entered into metanoia - then this brother was excluded from the community, he fasted, he stopped smoking or stopped eating or stayed three nights without sleeping, to signify that he was asking mercy for himself and praying to the Lord to have pity on him.

God is very patient, but there is something that is called, "to fill the measure of sins to the brim" (see 1 Th 2:16). For God always calls you to conversion. But there is a certain measure of sin in which you have put yourself in a situation where you are on the verge of dying eternally. So he sends you an illness, he allows you to fall in love with someone else's wife or allows you to fall, because he loves you and he wants to take you out of the situation you have gotten yourself into by calling you to conversion.¹⁵

¹⁴ With regard to the minister of penance refer to CCC 1461-1467.

CCC 1462: Forgiveness of sins brings reconciliation with God, but also with the Church. Since ancient times the bishop, visible head of a particular Church, has thus rightfully been considered to be the one who principally has the power and ministry of reconciliation: he is the moderator of the penitential discipline (LG 26). Priests, his collaborators, exercise it to the extent that they have received the commission either from their bishop (or religious superior) or the Pope, according to the law of the Church.

¹⁵ 1426 Conversion to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us "holy and without blemish," just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is "holy and without blemish" (Eph

I say all this so that you begin to give thanks to God if you have not killed anyone because you are no better than any murderer. If God permits someone in the community to get drunk and kill someone or some such thing, perhaps it is because God is teaching the whole community the mercy that he has for everyone. This is something St. Paul says. This brother will be a witness in the community so that the others may appreciate the love of God for them (see 1 Cor 10:6, 11-12; Rm 11:11). Or is it that you think that if you do not sin, it is because you are so good? Is it through your own efforts that you do not sin? Be careful!

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (see Pr 1:7). And blessed be that fear if you have it. I can tell you this through personal experience.

When I see myself in temptation, I begin to tremble and I ask the Lord to have mercy on me because I do not give a cent for my life. God can very easily lift his hand from my head to call me to conversion (see Ps 139:5). What the community does with this brother is the same thing that God does with every man to call him to conversion.

God allows someone to descend, to fall and see his life in ruins, become a drug addict, or something like that. God allows him to fall. Don't anyone think that a sinner's life is marvelous. This is why Jesus has such great mercy towards sinners and this is why we must pray a lot for them.

Well, this is a parenthesis.

This man, as I was saying, is called to conversion through being excluded from the community. This is where Ash Wednesday comes from. It was the day on which the ashes were given to the penitents; they could neither wash nor bathe, as a sign of penance.

Why have I been saying all this? So that you can understand and be able to answer when the people say: why do I have to go to confession to a man? Why do I have to tell my sins to a man, not directly to God?

(Carmen)

The crisis of confession today springs from this individual sense of sin. The first crisis which the Protestants presented was this one. If we have such an individualistic concept of sin, like that of "me and God," why does there have to be another person involved? God forgives me directly. This happens because the community, which is a fundamental element of penance, has

1:4; 5:27). Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life (see Council of Trent (1546): DS 1515). This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us (*ibid.*, DS 1545; LG 40).

been lost.

(Kiko)

So when this person had completed a time of penitence and he had shown signs of conversion, on Holy Thursday the bishop or the presbyter, the head of the community, brought him back into communion with the Church, with the assembly. This is a sign of the sacrament of penance: to bring back the brother, to confirm the fact that he is converted. This was done by the bishop who has the charism of discernment. In this sense, it can be perfectly understood how the bishop or the presbyter represents the community in this sign of receiving the brother once more, confirming his interior conversion.

This can be understood very well in the catechumenate. You can think that you are very Christian, but then your catechist arrives in the name of the bishop and tells you that you haven't got an ounce of Christianity, whereas you think you are a first-class Christian.

So the bishop welcomed those penitents who had shown real signs of conversion in the name of the community. This is a truly marvelous gesture. When you go to somebody's house the maid opens the door. It is a sign of great deference and love when the head of the house comes to the door personally to receive you. Since the Church has a tremendous love for sinners, the bishop, in the name of the community, comes to welcome this person and to raise him up with the depth of mercy and introduce him to the table of the Lord, the heavenly banquet. He receives him in the name of the whole community.

In this questionnaire you should also say that the celebration of the sacrament of Penance has also been renewed; the new rite is intended to recover some things: the assembly, the Word of God, the kiss of peace, etc. For a correct celebration of the sacrament, this rite must be followed.

You see that the presbyter does not only represent Jesus Christ but also the Church. The bishop or the presbyter represents not only Jesus Christ, but also the whole Church, the community. This is why the bishop is the one who, in the name of the Church, receives the person who comes back.

This sign is not very visible today.

Fifth Question: To what extent does confession show the sign of a community walking in a state of constant conversion under the impulse of the Holy Spirit?

You need to explain a little how, after Constantine, great numbers of people entered the Church, which resulted in a loss of the sense of community. A community walking in constant conversion led by the Holy Spirit was no longer seen. We see people who sin individually, who are absolved individually, then go to communion. But it is not easy to see a whole community of people in conversion who acknowledge themselves to be sinners.

(Sometimes I don't do the sixth and seventh questions because of lack of time but we'll look at them briefly anyway.)

Sixth Question: Do you think that the Christians you know have a sense of mutual forgiveness in their everyday lives, in the family, with their neighbors, in politics, at work? If not, does it not seem to you that sacramental forgiveness has no meaning?

Here the people usually say that they do not see this mutual forgiveness among Christians. Therefore the second part of the question has a meaning. But here we are not speaking of sacramental forgiveness with regard to its efficacy. (It is always efficacious in itself.) We are not talking about this but rather about the fact that if you, who have received forgiveness, do not forgive the others, it seems that the forgiveness you have received is only a game. Don't you think that, for people who are not Christians, the sign of confession will look like a pantomime? This is what the world says. Suppose your wife went to confession today, when she comes home she does not speak to you. You can imagine what a husband who does not go to Church will think of the forgiveness that his wife has received. This happens often. The people go to confession followed by communion and then... "This is intolerable," "He has to learn!" There is such a great dichotomy in us...

Seventh Question: How do you think that your Christian behavior appears to other people: intolerant, pharisaic, classist, moralistic?

If you have time, explain the fact of forgiveness as a sign. How is a man outside the Church going to realize that God has forgiven him his sins? Through the ecclesial community he has before him, which is the sign of Jesus Christ for man, which forgives him concretely. If you do not forgive at work, in the family, I laugh at your Christianity. It is all a sham, the community is useless.

CONCLUSION

If you who are the Church do not forgive, how can others believe that the Church forgives? The Church is a penitential community, a community that is not converted once and for all. In this journey the sacrament of penance is very important. Man today will find it difficult to accept penance if the Christian presents himself as the representative of a puritanical community, a community settled into a state of pseudo-conversion, a community that has arrived once and for all. The Church does not manufacture forgiveness, which comes from God. The Church acknowledging her sins and weakness will make God's strength visible which is communicated through her.

This conclusion refers to the fact that the Church is a community in continual metanoia, in conversion, on the move. The Church is a community that is walking, always moving towards God and looking towards God, accompanied by the light of Christ, the radiant light of the Father's countenance, which is the cross. This is what the early Christians called the cross of Jesus Christ: the radiant light of the Father's countenance.

For there is a kind of Christianity - and I myself have belonged to it - in which one thinks he is a converted Christian, a St. Aloysius Gonzaga, forever. And then there appear attitudes such as, "I would rather die than sin," which are not understood in their correct sense. It is a kind of Christianity in which what is most important is to be in a state of grace and to try not to lose this grace, to persevere, but all of this understood in a static sense. Grace is understood only as a thing which nobody really knows what it is, but it is something that you have inside you, you must never lose it but die with it. Then I understood that to live in grace means to live in the gratuitousness of God, who is forgiving you with his love, to believe in this forgiveness and constant love of God.

This type of Christianity, in which one presents himself as perfect and sublime, turns people off. In fact, it is the opposite of Christianity, because Christians are not perfect, but they are enlightened about their deep reality: they know that they really are sinners, through their sins they have experienced the mercy of God who forgives them and gives them new life as a fruit of his grace.

If it is not like this, it means that we have used religion to build ourselves up. Be careful because this is what is called triumphalism in the Church and is always equivalent to Pharisaism.

Deep down what are we all? Sinners and wretches. But at times we present ourselves with a triumphalism that disturbs other people. We can only be saved from this triumphalism, which is a kind of gaucherie - basically a lack of interior sincerity, trying to appear to be what you are not - when God enlightens us and makes us see ourselves in the truth, makes us know ourselves in our deep reality of sin.

Priests have often presented themselves as being without sin, so their weaknesses scandalized us because we had this sort of mentality. We are all great liars precisely because we think that people will not love us if they know us as we really are.

Let me tell you something someone once said to me: people love you more for your weaknesses than for your virtues. You will experience this in your life.

(Carmen)

Don't worry if the people don't understand much. Do not try to convince them by telling them all the things that I told you in the Catechesis on Penance. I told you this to have as a background so that when they ask you questions you can clarify things, but don't try to convince anyone.

The only thing you have to do strongly is the kerygmatic

part, calling them to conversion. Now, in this very moment in which we are gathered together to speak of these things, God appears here calling us, first of all, to conversion.

You are a gift to the people because you call them to conversion. This is why I say to you: PREACH CONVERSION. Because you have announced Jesus Christ, call people to conversion in his name.

"Convert!" the apostles will always say after the announcement of the kerygma. This is not to demand anything of anyone but it is to offer them the way and the light.

This is why you must not make any demands, but be aware that with you comes the Holy Spirit who will enlighten the way of conversion for them. You are a gift from God for the people, because you are the instruments of the light that calls them to conversion, which enlightens their crooked ways and opens a way of conversion for them to God. Tell them: Come here!

The next evening you will have the penitential celebration which is the rite in which, not only will they understand everything better, but they will receive conversion, because in it they will see the community, forgiveness. Our experience is that people have a much greater understanding of what the sacrament of penance is from the celebration rather than in the questionnaire.

I remember a woman at Canillejas who understood what forgiveness meant at the kiss of peace and went back to her hometown to ask forgiveness from relatives to whom she had not spoken for twenty-five years on account of some very serious things that happened in the war and whom she had never forgiven. There are, without doubt, cases where this celebration has a profound effect on the lives of the people.

I remember some young men in Rome saying that they received the first embrace mechanically but that after that they found themselves surrounded by a crowd of people who were giving them the kiss of peace and that they really received peace. At that moment they, who had felt themselves outside the whole celebration, received peace.

What I want to say is that the sacrament becomes a reality. Announce the Word of conversion to them with the certainty that it is not you but Jesus Christ who announces conversion and the forgiveness of sins to the world.

This forgiveness is expressed in a feast. Individual confession had lost this sense of the feast because joy cannot be expressed individually. This is why in the community the agape and the feast appear immediately afterwards as expressions of the fact that people have received the forgiveness of their sins.

(Kiko)

You must tell the people a little about the agape, reminding them of the parable of the prodigal son, in which there is a banquet to celebrate his return.

Tell them to bring some wine and something to eat.

TENTH DAYPENITENTIAL CELEBRATION

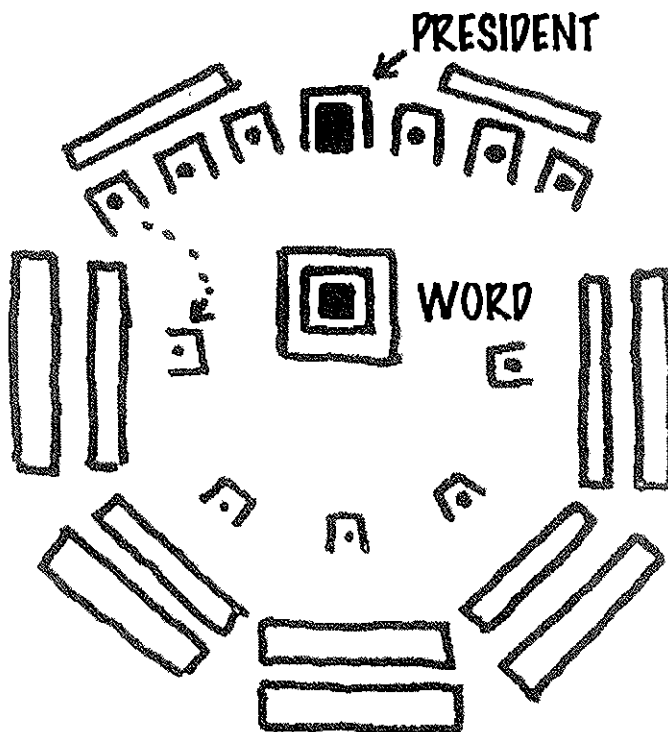
Catechism of the Catholic Church: Grace and justification (1987-2029); I believe in the forgiveness of sins (976-087); the acts of the penitent (1450-1460); the minister of this sacrament (1461-1467); the effects of this sacrament (11468-1470); how is the liturgy celebrated (1145-1162); the celebration of the sacrament of penance (1480-1484).

(Kiko)

You must prepare the places where the celebration and the agape will be held.

You must explain well to the presbyters before beginning the meaning of the celebration. It is convenient to prepare this celebration with the parish priest or with the priest who is following the catechesis so that he can be the one to tell the other priests about the concrete details of the celebration. If you have explained the celebration well to the parish priest the ground will have been well prepared, for he himself will explain how and why things should be done. Regarding the celebration, it must be carried out according to the new rite for the celebration of the sacrament of penance.

If possible hold the celebration in the church, arranging



the benches for the assembly in a rectangular or octagonal shape and leaving a space in the middle for the lectern with a processional cross on its right. This is important because the second reading refers to the bronze serpent that is raised up. I like the bronze crosses used in processions because you can see

better the parallelism. Don't do the celebration with the benches lined up in military rows. Look for carpets to put in the middle.

The presbyters are to be in their places, dressed in albs and stoles and the president with a purple cope. Take great care with these details that have a great influence on the form the celebrations of the community will take after the first stage of conversion, after the initial catechesis. It is important to take care of all these signs.

It is good to have several priests so that the private confessions will be lighter and more free. Tell the priests to give absolution according to the new rite approved by the reform of the sacrament of penance. After having made his confession standing, the penitent kneels for the absolution and the priest lays both hands on the penitent's head and concludes the absolution with the sign of the cross. The laying on of hands for forgiveness was already done in the primitive Church..

Tell the priests too that this is not the occasion for giving spiritual direction. If someone needs this, he should look for the priest in another moment. The priests should exercise their ministry in a brief and affectionate manner, exalting the mercy of God as the regeneration and sanctification granted to us by the death and resurrection of Christ.

At the moment of confessions, the priests move forward, standing in the middle of the assembly, so that you can see better the sign of the rite. With their backs to each other, they face the assembly (as shown in the diagram). The president does not move from his place. In this celebration it is not good to do confessions in the confessionals or in the corners otherwise the sign will be lost. Those presbyters who wish to, are also invited to confess to one another at the beginning of the confessions. This is a strong sign that helps the people.

Look for readers. If you can't find anyone who can proclaim the Word well, you of the team read the readings. But do this well: with strength, slowly, proclaiming the Word with authority in the assembly. If you don't read well, you ruin the celebration because the readings are long and the people become tired and don't listen.

This celebration deep down is a mystagogic catechesis. You can do it by dividing the work among the team, or you can let one person do all the monitions to the readings and introductions to the songs, as you think best. But it is important that it is done very well, with the conviction that Christ will pass through this sacrament to give us life and set us on a way of conversion. Because this celebration puts the people on the way towards the renewal of Baptism, so that this can be fulfilled in fullness in their lives.

Both the monitions and the introductions to the songs are a breaking of the bread of the Word for the assembly. Prepare them well. Do them with strength and kerygmatically. Pray to God that He may send the Holy Spirit so that you can do this prophetically.

The penitential rite will be deep down a communitarian prayer, expression of a Church in conversion. Within the

communitarian celebration we rediscover the value of individual confessions.¹

In this celebration, you put in first place the Word of God that calls to conversion.² We recover the community, the assembly, in which, all together on the way, begin to enter in a liturgy of conversion prepared by some catecheses in which the love of God and the forgiveness of sins have been announced. Now all of this will be realized in a sacrament, because God gives the Church the power not only to announce the forgiveness but also to give it, to communicate it, to transmit it, through a sacramental sign.

First of all, you have to practice the songs for the celebration with the people.

In the general admonition it is fundamental to say that the Paschal Mystery of Jesus is made present in this celebration to forgive sins. In the one who through this rite confesses himself sinner, letting himself be judged by the word and who believes that God has the power to resurrect him, now, to give him forgiveness, this is fulfilled.

(Carmen)

The strength of this celebration is in calling the people to conversion even if no one goes to confession. Because we are living in a mixed time in which penance is very much covered and re-dressed and not very well understood. This celebration though

¹ CCC 1482 The sacrament of Penance can also take place in the framework of a *communal celebration* in which we prepare ourselves together for confession and give thanks together for the forgiveness received. Here, the personal confession of sins and individual absolution are inserted into a liturgy of the word of God with readings and a homily, an examination of conscience conducted in common, a communal request for forgiveness, the Our Father and a thanksgiving in common. This communal celebration expresses more clearly the ecclesial character of penance. However, regardless of its manner of celebration the sacrament of Penance is always, by its very nature, a liturgical action and therefore an ecclesial and public action (Cf. SC 26-27).

² CCC 1153: A sacramental celebration is a meeting of God's children with their Father, in Christ and the Holy Spirit; this meeting takes the form of a dialogue, through actions and words. Admittedly, the symbolic actions are already a language, but the Word of God and the response of faith have to accompany and give life to them, so that the seed of the Kingdom can bear its fruit in good soil. The liturgical actions signify what the Word of God expresses: both his free initiative and his people's response of faith.

CCC 1454: The reception of this sacrament ought to be prepared for by an examination of conscience made in the light of Word of God. The passages best suited to this can be found in the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic Letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic teachings (Cf. Mt. 5-7; Rom 12-15; 1 Cor 12-13; Gal 5; Eph 4-6).

has to be a call to conversion that puts the people on a way of conversion. Confession can also come later, as it happened in the penitential institution of the primitive Church.

Do not put too much emphasis on saying: "tonight your sins are forgiven you," because then you run the risk that the people will confess themselves magically, just as they have done their whole life. Although they may do this anyway.

THE STRENGTH IS IN THE WORD OF GOD THAT CALLS TO CONVERSION THE PEOPLE AND PRESENTS TO THEM A PENITENTIAL WAY IN WHICH THEY MAY TRULY EXPERIENCE SALVATION AND THE FORGIVENESS OF THEIR SINS. THIS WAY IS A CATECHUMENATE, WHICH IS A LONG WAY OF CONVERSION TOWARDS THE WATERS OF BAPTISM.

SCHEME FOR THE PENITENTIAL CELEBRATION
INITIAL RITES

GENERAL MONITION

ENTRANCE SONG: "Towards you, holy city"

PRESIDENT'S GREETING (from the Rite)

PRAYER (from the Rite)

SONG OF INVOCATION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

MONITION TO THE FIRST READING

FIRST READING: Genesis 3: 1-24

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

SONG: "Psalm 50"

MONITION TO THE SECOND READING

SECOND READING: Numbers 21: 4-9

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

SONG: "The march is hard"

MONITION TO THE THIRD READING

THIRD READING: Acts 13: 13-39

(The third reading can be shortened as follows: Acts 13:13-16; 26-39, thus omitting the history of salvation in the Old Testament, since this reading will be also read in the celebration of the word in its fullness.)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

SONG: "He rose from death" or "If you feel a breeze from heaven"

MONITION TO THE GOSPEL

(In the monition to the Gospel you can be a little longer since there is no introduction to the song. In the monition you can explain the reading in the context of the celebration and of the neocatechumenal way.)

GOSPEL: John 3: 1-21

PRESIDENT'S HOMILY

(After the abundance of the Word of God and the catechesis, the homily can be brief. It should be kerygmatic and not moralistic. It is good that the president also gives his experience, so that the people may see that he also listens to the Word. This is because people think that the liturgies are for the people and the priest is only there to celebrate for the others, without entering personally. Therefore it is very strong to see the priest that lets himself be judged by the Word. Insist on this because many

priests are in the community or ask for the catechesis only to do a service for others and do not enter for themselves.)

RITE OF RECONCILIATION

EXHORTATION: 2 Cor 5: 17-21

(The President reads it with strength, feeling it, not with a tone of sermon.)

CONFITEOR

(After the exhortation, the President and all the assembly kneel and recite in a loud voice the Confiteor, preceded by the invitation and ending with the usual formula; this does not have the function of the general absolution because all of those who will confess will receive individual absolution.)

PRAYER OF THE PRESIDENT

Blessed are you Lord, our Father,
Holy God, Eternal King,
who, through your great goodness and endless mercy,
have shown your great love for us
in the body of your Son Jesus,
broken and crucified for our sins.

I, your unworthy servant,
called today to preside today over this assembly,
ask your forgiveness
and lean on your forbearance;
knowing that your nature,
which you have shown in your Son
is to have compassion on your creatures,
especially when they turn to you
and, instead of hiding their faults
confess them with sincere repentance.
Thus it is written:
"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them
will obtain mercy" (Pr 28:13).

Blessed are you,
who have shown your love
destroying our sin in the Cross of your Son.

Blessed are you,
who raised him up for our justification.

Therefore, we confess today
before you and your Church that we are sinners.

It is true that we have been insolent, flatters and
violent;

we have become impure by our base passions,
 we have been deceitful and lied;
 we have grumbled and been rebellious
 we have broken your decrees,
 we have despised your commandments.
 We have offended you.
 We have been wicked,
 we have been oppressors;
 We have been obstinate in evil.
 We are guilty.
 Have mercy on us.

Ass: Have mercy on us

Lord,
 you who are rich in mercy,
 slow to anger, you who forgive faults,
 in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.
 Receive our prayer and our song,
 grant conversion and repentance to our hearts,
 and lead us back to you.

We ask this united to your Son Jesus Christ,
 with the prayer that he himself has taught us;
 therefore, lifting up our hands to you,
 we dare to say:

OUR FATHER

(Explain the sense of the traditional gesture of raising one's hands in the Lord's Prayer)

INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

(We have already explained the position of the presbyters at the moment of confessions. Do not allow lines to be formed. If the president and the other priests wish to confess they may do so first followed by all of the faithful in an orderly manner. During the confessions use these songs: "Penitential Litany," "Psalm 50," etc. These songs are not done so as to not listen to the confessions, but are a prayer of all of the assembly participating in the liturgical action.)

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

(From the Rite; if possible, sung.)

CONCLUDING RITE

SIGN OF PEACE (explained)

(Since it is the first time that it is given, it is good to give before the sign a monition explaining its meaning. Let it be a real embrace. The women, if they want, can shake the men's hands. This embrace to the brother is the forgiveness that you give to your co-worker, to your

mother-in-law, to your husband, etc. It is a sign that God has given you His grace and His forgiveness. It should not create confusion, but at the same time, do not extend this sign only to your neighbor. After a sufficient time, tell the people to sit down and sing "Evenu Shalom.")

BLESSING

(Before the assembly disperses to go to the agape, explain to the people that the catechesis is not over, that this is only the beginning. Because there are many people who think that the catechesis is a kind of a mission that ends with confessions.)

AGAPE

PENITENTIAL CELEBRATION
WITH MONITIONS TO THE READINGS AND THE SONGS

*(From a tape recording of the penitential celebration in
the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians, Barcelona, 1971)*

INITIAL RITES

GENERAL MONITION

After these initial catecheses, the day before last, I have announced to you the kerygma, the Good News that all of your sins are forgiven. God has made a judgment on our sin, on our robberies, on our adulteries, on all our situation of sin and his judgment has been mercy. But now, brothers and sisters, there appears a second judgment: to accept or not this mercy.

To accept this mercy means to accept first of all that we are sinners: that we are in the wrong and that we go on crooked ways. If we recognize our sin, Jesus Christ comes this night through the presbyters of his Church to grant us the forgiveness.³

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins will become present here to forgive us. And Jesus Christ risen, who is present today in his Church, offers us through a sign, gratis, a way of conversion for the forgiveness of our sins.

It is here brothers and sisters, that Jesus Christ through time continues alive and present in his Church, offering us gratis his forgiveness, continues to make present in the world the immense love of God.

So, brothers and sisters, let us begin our celebration of conversion. Jesus Christ, here present, greatest manifestation of the countenance of the Father, appears this night giving us the possibility of conversion. It is the Word of God proclaimed this night in the assembly which calls us to conversion: it denounces our sin and invites us not to have fear, showing us

³ CCC 827: "Christ, 'holy, innocent and undefiled,' knew nothing of sin, but came only to expiate the sins of the people. The Church, however, *clasping sinners to her bosom*, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal" (LG 8 §33; cf. UR 3; 6). All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners (Cf. 1 Jn 1:8-10).

CCC 1847: "God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us" (*St. Augustine*). To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:8-9).

Jesus Christ, who loves and forgives us and is disposed to give us a new Spirit capable of not sinning if we believe in Him.⁴

This night the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ is made present here, opening for us a way of conversion to pass from our situation of death, caused by sin, to Eternal Life.

Let us stand up to welcome the presbyters and let us sing:

ENTRANCE SONG: "Towards you, holy city"

GREETING OF THE PRESIDENT (from the Rite)

PRAYER (from the Rite)

SONG OF INVOCATION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

MONITION TO THE FIRST READING

Brothers and sisters, the first reading that will be proclaimed in the midst of this assembly is from the book of Genesis. Perhaps we are not very used to listening. We have to begin a way to recover the Christian assembly, a way towards the people of God who are the people of the listening, who gathers to sing psalms to the Lord, to listen to his Word, to pray, without hurry; convinced that Jesus Christ makes himself present to save us, to forgive, to resurrect us who are here. We begin this way towards the Father through this reading in which is made present and clear the origin of your sin and mine.

Let us listen to the account of the sin of Adam and Eve. This is not something from past history. This Word makes clear your reality, because Adam and Eve are you, Adam and Eve is me today.

FIRST READING: Genesis 3: 1-24

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG AFTER THE FIRST READING

⁴ CCC 1848: As St. Paul affirms, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20). But to do its work grace must uncover sin so as to convert our hearts and bestow on us "righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21). Like a physician who probes the wound before treating it, God, by his Word and by his Spirit, casts a living light on sin.

CCC 1098: The assembly should prepare itself to encounter its Lord and to become "a people well disposed." The preparation of hearts is the joint work of the Holy Spirit and the assembly, especially of its ministers. The grace of the Holy Spirit seeks to awaken faith, conversion of heart and adherence to the Father's will. These dispositions are the precondition both for the reception of other graces conferred in the celebration itself and the fruits of new life which the celebration is intended to produce afterward.

Brothers, this Word which has been proclaimed here is fulfilled today and now among us. I was saying before that Adam and Eve are you and I, because like Adam you and I have listened one day to the catechesis of the Evil One that has told us: is it true that you can't eat of any of the trees of paradise? The Evil One has shown us that deep down if we cannot do one thing, we cannot do anything, we are not free, the law limits us. And we thought: well, it's true, that thing is good. And the tree has appeared good to acquire wisdom. And we have said: why doesn't God let me do this if it is good and appetizing?

We have heard that Eve has said to the serpent: God has told us not to eat because if we eat, we die. We discover here, brothers and sisters, what we were saying about sin.

Look what the Bible says about sin: sin is not something that harms God. Sin kills us. The one who commits sin dies. For this God does not want us to sin, because he loves us and knows what will happen to us.

Deep down, to sin is to consider oneself more intelligent than God, to consider God less than our own reason. And you and I, brothers and sisters, have eaten and have not accepted that there is someone above our reason, something that we do not comprehend. Truth, for you and me, has been nothing more than what we can reach and understand. We need to walk according to the security that is given to us by our reason.

By eating it has happened to us the same as Adam: we have known fear, we have tasted death, the spiritual death, the ontic death, we have known evil, the separation from God. And God is life. We have tasted death and we have begun to have fear. Work, instead of being a marvel, has converted for us into sweat and bother. And the same with having children, as we see happens to Eve. Everything that bothers us has been converted into the symbol of ontological death, of the death of our interior being. This is our situation. Because of this we are not happy. This is why today you suffered at work, because work has not been as you wanted it to be. For when things do not go according to how you think they should be, they destroy you and you do not want to die. None of us wants to die.

But, brothers and sisters, a Word of salvation has also been proclaimed here. Here we have heard that God said: the Son of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. In Scripture, we know that There exists a Woman. Jesus, at the wedding feast of Cana, calls his mother "woman," and from the cross as well (see Jn 2:4; 19:26).

Brothers and sisters: if any one of you present here today is kept enslaved by the fear of death, it is here that this Word of salvation is fulfilled today: For the Son of the Woman comes to crush the head of the serpent that is in your heart.

Look brothers and sisters, I am going to tell you something. There are three ways of being in the world: two false and one true.

The first is that of the man who does not want to accept his reality of malediction. We have heard that God says: because of your fault the land will be accursed, it will yield brambles and thistles; you will work the land with toil, with the sweat

of your brow, until you return to the dust from which you were formed. The first attitude is that of the man who does not want to accept this Word of God. But the Word of God is prophetic therefore is always fulfilled. It is the man, seeing that it is true that the world is hostile to him, that work and life become a hell, tries to escape from this world and he invents his own worlds: he alienates himself. There are many types of alienation. Even religion can be a type of alienation, like drugs, like alcohol, like soccer... With all these things you flee from the world and you form your own, escaping from your family, from work. And the man who does not incarnate into his reality, because he cannot bear that the earth may be accursed. They are the people who escape by taking refuge in sport, in soccer, who coming home do not want their wives to pull out problems, because they come tired and they have already enough problems.

The second form is the opposite. It is the one who not accepting the malediction of the world, doesn't accept either his condition of being a sinner and wants to change the world with his fists. He does not accept a world with sin, with wars, with vices, etc.; it horrifies him and he tries to fight to build a perfect world. This kind of man wants to impose his world on everybody. Here there are various political movements. To these, we would need to ask: how would you like this world to be? Would you like that all men would be good? Would you like that nobody would be hungry? If we were to ask ourselves sincerely this question, we would see that the world that we would like is a world in which, there is no place for freedom, because it is a world in which there is no place for sin. Hitler wanted to build his own world: a perfect world. But it is always a world in which there has to be an iron police force, prisons, etc. because there cannot be sin, because sin destroys society. It is obvious! It is very easy to deceive ourselves.

But there is a third position: and it is the one position of those who welcome this Word proclaimed and it becomes theirs. They accept that what God has said is the truth: that we are sinners, that the world is accursed because of the sin of men. And accepting this reality, they continue to listen to this Word and wait for God to come and bless the earth, God! And we are here because we wait for God to really send the Messiah among us to transform us, to establish his kingdom, a kingdom in which all men can be eternally happy. But only God is the one who knows how to make a kingdom in Truth.

However, you cannot accept this salvation if you do not accept your own reality of sin. We are sinners. For this, brothers and sisters, let it be that this Word comes to our depth, reaches us, put us into our true place and judges us and we can say, giving glory to God, that it is true that we have wanted to be God,⁵ that we do not accept to obey anyone and that

⁵ CCC 1451: Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again" (Council of Trent).

the only law is the one of our reason. Let us recognize ourselves sinners.

Brothers and sisters, let us sing Psalm 50: Have mercy on me, have mercy, my God, for your immense goodness, have mercy on us.

SONG: "Psalm 50"

MONITION TO THE SECOND READING

The second reading, brothers and sisters, is a very brief reading from the book of Numbers. It is a passage about the march of the people of Israel in the desert. You know that God has chosen a people for himself. When God has looked to the nations he has not met a more miserable wretched people. They were not even a people, but a group of slaves in Egypt. He said to them: you will be my people. He sent them Moses to them, He made wonders with them, took them from the slavery of Egypt in which they were obliged to work like beasts, making bricks; He opened for them the sea submerging all of their enemies; He gave them the manna. Now he is guiding them through the desert. But there comes a moment when they rebel against God and they sin. Let us see the sin of this people, because it is our sin.

SECOND READING: Numbers 21: 4-9

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG AFTER THE SECOND READING

In the first reading, brothers and sisters, there has appeared a serpent. Also here a serpent appears. And this Word too is fulfilled today among us. It is a Word that expresses our reality of today.

Think of this people that has been snatched by God from the slavery of Egypt. The initiative has come from God, who has said to Moses: go to liberate my people. Because God cannot see his people suffering he puts himself in movement, working marvels in their favor to free them. He has opened the sea submerging in it all the enemies who were chasing them. He has made them walk through the desert giving them the manna. But there comes a moment in which this people murmur against God and against Moses saying: but where are we going through here? If in the desert you die of hunger and thirst: here we shall all die. They thought themselves to be more intelligent than God. Reason told them that no one survives in the desert. They had already forgotten all the wonders God had done for them. They think, that deep down, everything that has happened to them is by chance. They say: where is God? - because they do not see him. They believe themselves to be more intelligent than God and that they are self-sufficient.

And God, who loves them, sends them many little serpents, that bite them, and they die. God has realized that they have got themselves into such a position that conversion is impossible for them. Again they have sinned saying that there is no God. They knew very well that in the desert you don't go anywhere because there you die of hunger and thirst. Therefore

God, through this phenomenon of the venomous serpents, says this to them: where are you going? You believe yourself to be so intelligent and look, you are not even able to free yourself from the death that a little animal like this produces...

It has happened like this to you also. Perhaps it was a sickness that has brought you back to your true dimension. God allows certain phenomena to call you to conversion, to bring you back to your true dimension, because maybe you believe yourself to be the king of the world and you need to come down to your true reality.

With this event, people understand that God is speaking to them. This people consider God to be the prime cause of all that happens. They have understood the lesson: we die if God does not help us; there has to be someone superior to ourselves. Think about something: death is always at our heels and the only solution we have is that there exists someone stronger than death.

Therefore the people go to Moses and they say to him: we have sinned against heaven and against you; pray to God to free us. Moses prays and God says to him: lift up a wooden pole and put upon it a serpent of bronze; whoever has been bitten by a serpent and looks at the bronze serpent will be healed.

This people that has said that there is no God, now has to believe in the power of a Word that God has spoken: look at bronze serpent. Imagine what foolishness. They don't even have to take anything or do complicated magic rituals. They have only to look. Only the one who believes in this Word and looks at the bronze serpent will be healed.

Well, brothers and sisters, I was saying that this Word is fulfilled here among us because we have also been bitten by a serpent and we have sinned. We have experienced death. The venom of death which is inside us makes us die, makes us not like the life we lead, makes us be unhappy, causes us to be encircled by death, inside and out and death brings us to corruption.

But God, this night, has had mercy on us too. Maybe you, too, like the people murmur and say: where are we going with these catecheses and these celebrations? What foolishness!

But if we want to be saved, first we have to recognize our sin. God in fact has had mercy on us and he has raised up here, too, a pole with a serpent; and it is here [pointing to the crucifix].

Maybe someone may be scandalized and say: how dare you call Jesus Christ a serpent? Well look, brothers and sisters: do you know what this Word says to you? If here there is some brother or sister who has been bitten by sin, by the evil one, who has made him believe that there is no God and he has believed this - and this is sin- let him know that the way he has to be healed of sin is what the Word says to us: look at Jesus crucified for your sin.

Jesus has taken upon himself our sins and smashed them against the cross. Do you truly believe that your sins are here crucified? Do you believe that Jesus has killed them, that they no longer have any power over you? Today this word invites you

to look at Jesus and to see that he has died for your sins. He is the one sent by the Father to heal you from your sins.

(Carmen)

Don't believe that to look at the crucifix is something magical. Like looking at the bronze serpent, it means to recognize yourself sinner and to look from whence salvation for your situation comes.

SONG: "The march is hard"

MONITION TO THE THIRD READING

The third reading, brothers and sisters, is from the Acts of the Apostles. In it we will listen to the kerygma proclaimed by St. Paul for us today.

St. Paul arrives at Antioch and goes to the church of those days: the synagogue. He goes there on the Sabbath day and gathers with them. As is the custom in the synagogue when some visiting Hebrew comes, especially in the case of St. Paul who was like a monk, he was a Pharisee, after the Torah has been read and after the homily, they ask the guest to speak, if they have some word of exhortation to add for the brothers.

St. Paul, who was accompanied by some brothers, gets up and announces the kerygma, beginning with the history of salvation.

He ends this kerygma, that is for us today, saying: "Let all of you well understand that through this One the forgiveness of sin is announced to you and the complete justification which you could not obtain through the law of Moses, is obtained through him by everyone who believes."

St. Paul today preaches to us sanctification, the justification through the merits of Jesus, through his blood that washes us from every crime and can make of the most sinful man a just one. Let us listen to this Word of God for us today, which is the kerygma of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THIRD READING: Acts 13: 13-39

(The Third Reading can be shortened in the following way: Acts 13: 13-16 and 26-39, omitting the history of salvation in the Old Testament, since this reading will be also read in the celebration of the word in its fullness.)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG AFTER THE THIRD READING

We have listened to the kerygma of St. Paul. We have heard about death, corruption and resurrection. It says that in him, in Jesus, is fulfilled the promise made to Abraham and to all of the fathers throughout the history of salvation. God promised a land, descendants, a blessing. He has promised to David that he would not experience corruption.

All of this he has fulfilled in Jesus, since he, brothers and sisters, really entered with human nature into the divinity,

into the Trinity. He has achieved transcendence, he has been resurrected by God and he has entered into the Promised Land.

Because he has not experienced corruption, because sin has been pardoned, because he has assumed our nature. And as man he has been resurrected by God. Death has been overcome, because sin has been pardoned and because the wage of sin was death.

For this is why we Christians are called to the resurrection and baptism grafts us into the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him we have been given the guarantee of our resurrection, in the Holy Spirit.

So, what great news can we announce? God forgives our sins and with his Holy Spirit makes us saints, children of God! And this gratis for anyone who recognizes and believes that Jesus is the One sent by the Father as his Savior.

St. Paul says: O Death, where is your victory? Where is your sting? The sting of death is sin (see 1 Cor 15:55-56). What gives strength to death is sin. When one finds himself in sin and there is an earthquake he goes running to the Church straight away. We are very much afraid.

Brothers and sisters, let us now sing our faith, our joy, because we are called to participate in Eternal Life.

SONG: "He rose from death" or "If you feel a breeze from heaven"

MONITION TO THE GOSPEL:

(In the monition to the Gospel you can be a little longer since there is no introduction to the song. In the monition you can explain the reading in the context of the celebration and of the neocatechumenal way)

In this fourth reading, which is from the Gospel, we shall listen that Jesus says to all of us: You must be born again, because whoever is not born from above, from heaven, cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. We must be born from water and the Spirit, because what is born of the flesh is flesh. Do you remember when we spoke about the man of the flesh and the man of the Spirit? No one sees the wind, we listen to its voice but we do not know from where it comes nor where it goes. It is like this of the one who is born from the Spirit.. He does not know where he goes, he entrusts himself to God, he knows existentially that God is love and he abandons himself to Him. Opposite to the people of Israel who doesn't want to go through ways he doesn't know and wants the absolute security of his reason that is his only god.

We shall listen, brothers and sisters, to this baptismal catechesis which is a powerful Word for us today, which ends by saying that there is a very serious sin: that of the sin of those brothers and sisters who do not want to come into the light because the light denounces that their works are evil. We have already said that God has judged the sins of men and that his judgment has been mercy. But now there is a new judgment: to accept or not accept this forgiveness, this mercy. Some do not accept this forgiveness, because this means to accept first of

all to be sinners and this they do not want to recognize. Let us listen, brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL: John 3:1-21

PRESIDENT'S HOMILY

(After the abundance of the Word of God and the catechesis, the homily can be brief. It should be kerygmatic and not moralistic. It is good that the president also gives his experience, so that the people may see that he also listens to the Word. This is because people think that the liturgies are for the people and the priest is only there to celebrate for the others without entering personally. Therefore it is very strong to see the priest that lets himself be judged by the Word. Insist on this because many priests are in the community or ask for the catechesis only to do a service for others and do not enter for themselves.)

RITE OF RECONCILIATION

EXHORTATION: 2 Cor 5: 17-21

(The President reads this with strength and feeling it, not with the tone of voice of a sermon.)⁶

CONFITEOR

(When the exhortation is over, the President and all the assembly kneel down and say the "I confess" aloud, preceded by the invitation and ending with the usual formula; this does not have the function of the general absolution as all those who will make their private confession will receive individual absolution.

PRAYER OF THE PRESIDENT

Blessed are you Lord, our Father,
Holy God, Eternal King,
who, through your great goodness and endless mercy,

⁶ CCC 1442: Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry which he charged with the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). The apostle is sent out "on behalf of Christ" with "God making his appeal" through him and pleading: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).

CCC 1461: Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation (Cf. Jn 20:23; 2 Cor 5:18), bishops who are their successors and priests, the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

have shown your great love for us
in the body of your Son Jesus,
broken and crucified for our sins.

I, your unworthy servant,
called today to preside today over this assembly,
ask your forgiveness
and lean on your forbearance;
knowing that your nature,
which you have shown in your Son
is to have compassion on your creatures,
especially when they turn to you
and, instead of hiding their faults
confess them with sincere repentance.
Thus it is written:
"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them
will obtain mercy" (Pr 28:13).

Blessed are you,
who have shown your love
destroying our sin in the Cross of your Son.

Blessed are you,
who raised him up for our justification.

Therefore, we confess today
before you and your Church that we are sinners.

It is true that we have been insolent, flatters and violent;
we have become impure by our base passions,
we have been deceitful and lied;
we have grumbled and been rebellious
we have broken your decrees,
we have despised your commandments.
We have offended you.
We have been wicked,
we have been oppressors;
We have been obstinate in evil.
We are guilty.
Have mercy on us.

Ass: Have mercy on us

Lord,
you who are rich in mercy,
slow to anger, you who forgive faults,
in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.
Receive our prayer and our song,
grant conversion and repentance to our hearts,
and lead us back to you.

We ask this united to your Son Jesus Christ,
with the prayer that he himself has taught us;
therefore, lifting up our hands to you,
we dare to say:

OUR FATHER

(Explain the meaning of the traditional gesture of raising the hands during prayer on Sunday.)

INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

(We have already explained the position of the presbyters at the moment of confessions. Do not allow lines to be formed. If the president and the other priests wish to confess they may do so first followed by all of the faithful in an orderly manner. During the confessions use these songs: "Penitential Litany," "Psalm 50," etc. These songs are not done so as to not listen to the confessions, but are a prayer of all of the assembly participating in the liturgical action.)⁷

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING
(From the Rite; if possible, sung.)

CONCLUDING RITE

SIGN OF PEACE

(Since it is the first time that it is given, it is good to give before the sign a monition explaining its meaning. Let it be a real embrace. The women, if they want, can shake the men's hands. This embrace to the brother is the forgiveness that you give to your co-worker, to your

⁷ CCC 1455: The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible.

CCC 1459: Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is also called "penance."

CCC 2840: Now -- and this is daunting -- this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see (Cf. 1 Jn 4:20). In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace.

mother-in-law, to your husband, etc. It is a sign that God has given you His grace and His forgiveness. It should not create confusion, but at the same time, do not extend this sign only to your neighbor. After a sufficient time, tell the people to sit down and sing "Evenu Shalom.")

BLESSING

(Before the assembly disperses to go to the agape, explain to the people that the catechesis is not over, that this is only the beginning. Because there are many people who think that the catechesis is a kind of a mission that ends with confessions.)

AGAPE

ELEVENTH DAYTHE PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES

After the Penitential Celebration and before beginning the catecheses that will introduce the Word of God, it is good to dedicate a day so that the people may express their experiences, positive and negative, on what significance the catecheses and the penitential celebration have had in their lives.

Arranging the assembly in a circle, ask one by one to briefly give their personal experience:

- If the catecheses have helped them and why;
- What impression he has overall and if he is thinking of continuing the catecheses.

It is not a matter of beginning a discussion on the ideas that some of those listening to you may not have seen very clearly. It is a matter of giving the experience personally lived.

It will help you to know a little of the background of those listening to you.

At the end of the experiences, it is good to let people know that the catecheses will conclude with a convivence of two and a half days. Tell the date, so that they can keep it free from engagements.

Make it clear to them that the convivence is a very strong passage of God. It is not a point of arrival, but the departure point for a community that will begin the neocatechumenal way.

TRIPOD CHRISTIAN LIFE

	WORD	LITURGY	COMMUNITY
1ST PART	KERYGMA	PENITENTIAL CELEBRATION	AGAPE
2ND PART	KERYGMA IN THE SCRIPTURES	CELEBRATION OF THE WORD	AGAPE
3RD PART-- CON-VIVENCE	KERYGMA IN THE EUCHARIST	CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST	BIRTH OF THE COMMUNITY

You can show that in the convivence you begin to live strongly the third part of the tripod (Word - Liturgy - Community). It is on this tripod that the catecheses and the neocatechumenal way are based.

Tell the people not to worry about money, explaining that at the end of the convivence there will be an anonymous collection and not to worry about children, if they cannot be left with someone, they can be brought to the convivence (in which case babysitters will need to be found).

The most important thing, though, is to invite the people to the convivence kerygmatically, with strength, inviting them to put God in the first place, if through the catecheses he has spoken to them.

In the following catecheses, take the people's names and dialogue with those who have difficulties.

TWELFTH DAYABRAHAM

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The Creator (279,324); The beginning of the history of salvation (280-1080); God chooses Abraham (59-61, 72, 762, 1541); the promises made to Abraham (422, 705, 706, 1222, 1716, 1725, 1819, 2571, 2619); the covenant of God with Abraham (72, 992, 2571); Abraham, father of all who believe (144-146, 165, 2570, 2572, 2676).

(This catechesis was given in the parish of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers in Madrid in April 1972)

(Kiko)

Perhaps some of you might think that what we are doing here is to give you a biblical knowledge. It's not about that. What I really want to do is something I believe is much more important, since to come to really know these books of the Scriptures and discover in them the source of life will be what we will do throughout the catechumenate. For now we will do something that is very simple.

It is as if we had here a big, delicious cake. Imagine that I tell you that this cake is a masterpiece of patisserie and that I begin to explain to you how this cake has been made and what the ingredients are: the quantity of eggs, the flour, sugar, etc. But much more important than doing this, so that you really get to know what this cake is, would be to cut a slice of it for you to eat, for the cake was made fundamentally to be eaten.

I will do exactly this in the two following catecheses. Instead of giving you explanations about this book that is the Bible (collection of books), we will open this book. Basically what we will do is give it to you to try: have you taste the Word of God. To do this, so that the Word of God really says something existential to you, we will speak tonight and the next time about two words of God and we will give them to you to taste.

Today I will take a biblical theme: I will talk to you about Abraham. Through this theme I hope that you will begin to have a glimpse of the marvel that is the Word of God, the marvel that is the Old Testament.

Many people think that the Old Testament has no importance and that what is important is only the New Testament. Perhaps many of you have begun to read the Old Testament and what you found is that it speaks of killings, wars, many strange things, psalms, battles, etc. and you did not understand much: on the other hand, you have read the New Testament and it seemed more comprehensible and easy. It seemed to you that the God of the Old Testament is a vengeful God, always making justice, whereas the God of the New Testament seems different. We'll talk about this too. I can only tell you for the time being that the New Testament cannot be understood, nor can Jesus Christ,

without the Old Testament and the history of the people of Israel. Jesus Christ is a tree which flowers in the New Testament but has its roots in the entire history of a people.

Perhaps many of you have prejudices about the Bible. For this reason, I hope that today the Lord will really make you discover the marvel and the richness of the Word of God and so see how marvelous this catechumenate will be. The catechumenate will be based fundamentally on the Word, on opening these Scriptures that take life in the midst of the assembly. These Scriptures in themselves are only writings and paper, but within a Church which has faith and the Holy Spirit, they come to life and make God himself appear in our midst, saving us.

If we open this book, we see that it is made up of a series of books, each one with its own name. The first one we find is GENESIS. Today we shall open Genesis, which is the Word of God, and we will make it present. We shall see the power this Word has with regard to your life today.

Today in the Book of Genesis we will make one word concrete, which is ABRAHAM. For many of you, Abraham is a figure known through the sacred history you studied in school. But today we shall discover new things about this character, who perhaps has had very little to say in your life.

With Abraham the history of salvation begins, because God comes to save within history. We are men who fulfill ourselves in history, who live in time. And our life is in relation to the lives of other men, past, present and to come. We exist within the history of mankind. God has never been far from this history of humanity, but has acted within it. Within the history of mankind, God has established a history with his interventions of salvation. This history is the history of salvation. This history is the one that these Scriptures aim to express: the history of our salvation. Everything written here is written with regard to you and to me. Today we shall see this a little bit. This book has a direct relationship with your life and your problems.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis are a preamble, an introduction to this history of salvation. The first thing which the Bible presents is that God created man in his own image and likeness, and did not create him to suffer and to die, but to be happy, to live on the earth as in a garden, procreating, reigning, being happy. The beginning of Genesis says that God created everything in the world and that everything God created is good.¹

But if we speak of the history of salvation, it is because man has to be saved from something. Thus the prologue will be to present the progressive fall of humanity, the sin of mankind. So

¹ CCC 280: Creation is the foundation of "all God's saving plans," the "beginning of the history of salvation" (GCD 51) that culminates in Christ. Conversely, the mystery of Christ casts conclusive light on the mystery of creation and reveals the end for which "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth": from the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ (Gen 1:1; cf. Rom 8:18-23).

we can understand why, and from what, God is going to save man.

The first thing that happens, then, is that man separates himself from God. The sin of Adam and Eve appears. Because man separates himself from God, man knows ontological death, he discovers the death of being, he discovers what it means not to be loved, he discovers that he dies; he discovers the evil inside himself. As a consequence of this discovery, selfishness is born.

As a consequence of man separating himself from God, man separates himself from man. Cain and Abel appear (Gn 4).

As a result of this, sin progressively degenerates humanity, until all humanity is totally submerged in evil, in sin and in death, to the point where humanity is walking straight toward destruction: the tower of Babel (see Gn 6-11).

But parallel to this, in front of this sin, the Scriptures present the intervention of God who is not passive in heaven in front of the misfortune of humanity: FROM THE VERY SIN OF MAN GOD DRAWS OUT SALVATION AND LIFE.

When Adam and Eve sin, God makes a promise: the son of a woman will crush the head of the serpent, symbol of the power of evil over man (see Gn 3:15).

On the forehead of Cain who sinned killing his brother, God stamps a "Tau" to defend him from the men who want to kill him (see Gn 4:15).

At the universal flood, which is the symbol that the whole of humanity is submerged under the waters of death (trying to escape from death, the whole of humanity is a victim of the idolatry of the world), God makes a covenant with Noah: he will never again allow humanity to die. As a sign of this covenant he leaves the rainbow (see Gn 9:12-16).

You know that all these words of salvation are fulfilled in Jesus Christ; in him humanity overcomes death and has access to eternal life, so that mankind never dies.

We have preached to you that you will not die. Jesus Christ is the fullness and fulfillment of all the promises of salvation that God has made throughout history.

After this preamble, God puts a plan of salvation into action to fulfill the promises made to Adam, Cain and Noah, that he will save mankind. God sets in motion a plan of salvation for all men, to free all men from death and sin.

This history of salvation has a beginning, a father: ABRAHAM.² To fulfill the promises of salvation, God begins to act and elects a man called Abraham (see Gn 12 - 23).

² CCC 1080: From the very beginning God blessed all living beings, especially man and woman. The covenant with Noah and with all living things renewed this blessing of fruitfulness despite man's sin which had brought a curse on the ground. But with Abraham, the divine blessing entered into human history which was moving toward death, to redirect it toward life, toward its source. By the faith of "the father of all believers," who embraced the blessing, the history of salvation is inaugurated.

Abraham is a man who is neither better nor worse than anyone else. He is a wanderer, a nomad who lives depending on his herds. He is a polytheist. Like all people of his time he believes in many gods. But there's something different about this man: he is a failure, because he is already old and has neither children nor a land where he can be buried.

When Abraham meets God, he is in Ur of Chaldea. He is an Aramaean. God calls Abraham from Ur. He is a shepherd, a nomad, who goes from place to place looking for pastures for his herds. To begin this history of salvation God chooses this old man. Something curious. He is a man who has failed in life, because he has not managed to have two things that are very important to him. He is cursed because he does not have any children,³ a horrible thing in those times, humiliating. He is impotent, a man without descendants. His being and his person will finish with him when he dies because he will not be able to continue himself in his descendants. He will not be able to transmit to anyone all that he has learned, everything he has suffered in life; he has no sons.

At that time to be without sons was considered a terrible curse. And besides that, those nomads live in tribes, like the gypsies today, and the whole clan defends itself against other shepherds. They steal from the others and they depend upon the family clan for security. The stronger the clan, the more secure they are. This is why it is a good thing to have many sons, so that when they are grown up they can defend you. The ideal of this man is to have a son and he has not achieved this.

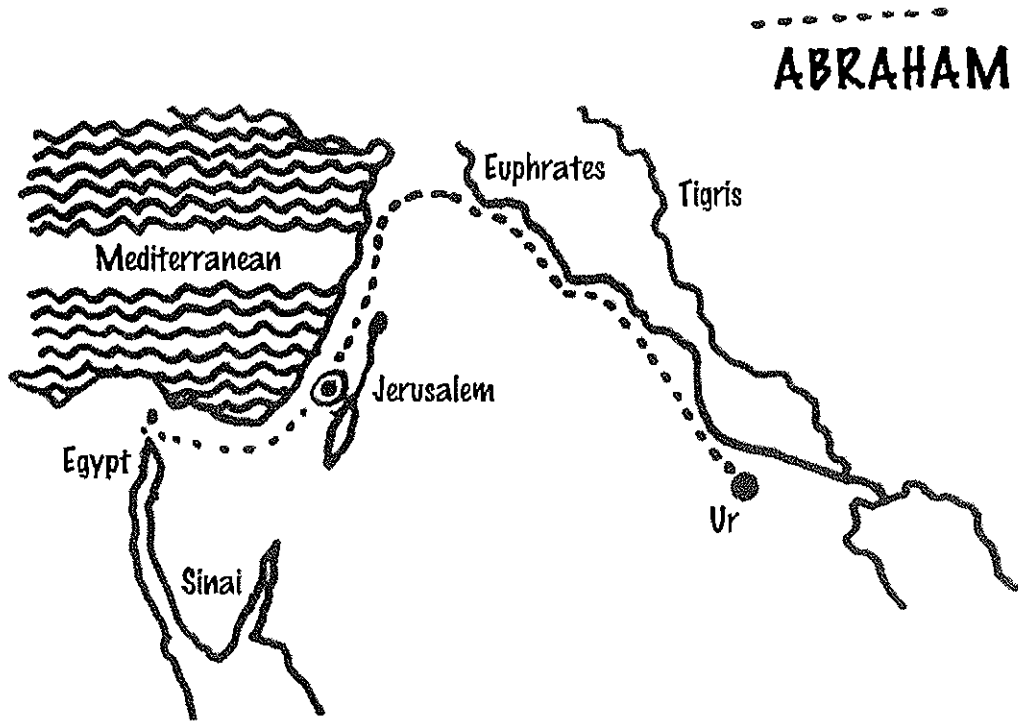
Besides that, he wants to have a land of his own where he can spend his old age and be buried. He is terrified by the idea of dying without knowing where he will be buried. This is a very primitive idea of natural religion according to which the earth gives us life (that is why many people bury their dead in the fetal position, because to be buried is like going back to mother earth). Abraham does not have that land. Nor does he have the possibility of getting it, because at that time land was captured and defended by force and he does not have sons to defend it.

When God appears, Abraham is an old man who has managed to have neither sons nor land. Since he is a nomad, he has travelled among many peoples and maybe, as his fathers did (see Jos 24:2), he has made sacrifices to other gods to get what he wanted: a son and a land.

When God appears, Abraham is already tired and old, defeated and with no desire to go on living. He does not know what to do, because his life has no meaning: his wife is too old to have children; he feels he has no vigor left. He thinks: If when I was young I did not manage to get what I want, what am I going to do now that I am 75, old and tired? Abraham does not know why he is living.

³ CCC 2374: Couples who discover that they are sterile suffer greatly. "What will you give me," asks Abraham of God, "for I continue childless?" (Gen 15:2) And Rachel cries to her husband Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Gen 30:1)

This is when this God intervenes and manifests himself. (God is silent for long periods in history; God is not in a hurry). Now he intervenes with Abraham. Imagine the surprise: an old, unfortunate Aramean will have a connection with me and with you.



God calls him and says to him: "LEAVE YOUR LAND AND YOUR KINSFOLK. LEAVE YOUR CLAN AND YOUR SECURITIES AND COME WITH ME. I SHALL GIVE YOU THIS SON YOU LONG FOR, AND THE LAND" (see Gn 12:1-3).⁴

I imagine that Abraham did not know who was talking to him. He felt in the depths of his heart that someone was telling him to leave his country and his kinsfolk. I imagine that God must have said to him: Isn't it true that up until now your securities, your clan, and your gods have not given you either a land or sons? Well, trust in me, and I shall give them to you.

And Abraham believed that this God was powerful enough to give him a son (even though he was old and his wife was barren) and to give him a land. AND ABRAHAM STARTED WALKING, KEEPING IN HIS HEART THIS WORD THAT HOLDS A PROMISE (see Gn 12:4). He does not know where he is going since God will not tell him anything else for the time being, nor does God give him any guarantee. But Abraham sets out on the way, leaving his clan and his securities.

⁴ CCC 59: In order to gather together scattered humanity God calls Abram from his country, his kindred and his father's house (Gen 12:1), and makes him Abraham, that is, "the father of a multitude of nations." "In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 17:5; 12:3 (LXX); cf. Gal 3:8).

Imagine Abraham's wife, Sarah, what did she think... She would have gone on and on at Abraham: But are you insane? Where are we going? Are we going to leave our cousins who are the only ones who can defend us? You're crazy! They are going to kill us. What's happened is that you've gone silly in your old age.

But Abraham, poor man, carries on walking, without knowing where he is going. In those days, to leave one's family was to be left defenseless on the road, without any future.

For a long time God does not appear to him again. Abraham carries on walking, making this journey. (Refer to the drawing on the board.)

When he arrives in Canaan he finds a fertile and marvelous land. He does not understand its inhabitants' language. He feels like a foreigner there. Besides that, he sees that the people there are strong and he is terrified.

God appears again and says: THIS LAND WHICH TODAY YOU TREAD AS A FOREIGNER, THIS BIG, FERTILE AND SPACIOUS LAND, WILL BE YOURS AND YOUR DESCENDANTS (see Gn 12:7; 15:1ff).

Abraham has suffered greatly during the years of God's silence, feeling abandoned, walking because of the strength of a promise in which he believed. Now, when God appears to him again, he says: Wait a minute, don't go away! Give me a guarantee, otherwise I will go mad! Give me a guarantee that I shall have this land, because with things as they are, it is impossible to go on walking (see Gn 15:2-3,8).

God accepts this and makes a pact with Abraham, according to the custom of the time. He gives him a guarantee (see Gn 15:9-20). God orders Abraham to prepare a good banquet with the animals cut in halves. (That's the way it was done back then. Then the two parties passed between the two halves saying: Let it happen to me like it happened these animals if I break the contract. And then each one ate his portion.) So God commands Abraham to prepare the animals cut in half. God himself passes between them at nightfall in the form of a pillar of fire and consumes his part. But he does not allow Abraham to pass. Abraham does not have to do anything on his part; only God passes between the animals. God does not ask anything of Abraham, but he promises to give him everything that he has always desired. All the initiative of the covenant depends on God and not on Abraham.

God says to him: "COUNT THE STARS IN THE NIGHT IF YOU CAN: SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE. COUNT THE GRAINS OF SAND OF THE SEA: YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE AS NUMEROUS AS THEY ARE" (see Gn 15:5).

This prophecy has been fulfilled: the whole Catholic Church, with its millions of people, are the descendants of Abraham. We are the children of Abraham.

Since the promises are not being fulfilled at all, Abraham begins to doubt and to think for himself: When will God give me a son? How..? So he tries to fulfill the promises on his own, with his reason. And he thinks: Well, maybe the son which God has promised me is one I have to get by going to bed with my wife's slave? (In those days the law allowed this. If the slave

gave birth to a son on her mistress's knees, this son would be considered to have been born from the mistress.) So he does this. He has a son by Hagar. He calls him Ishmael (see Gen 16:1-16).

So his life becomes hell, because the slave begins to act as the lady as she feels she is the most important one. Sarah is barren and has not been able to do what Hagar had done: to give Abraham a son. A moment arrives in which Sarah says to Abraham: Either the slave or me; you get rid of her and her son at once, or else I will go away. And poor Abraham has to drive the slave and Ishmael away (see Gen 21:8-11). Abraham has experienced that it is neither through his reason nor his own ideas that the promise will be fulfilled.

God appears to him again and says: The son of the promise is not Ishmael, but the one who will be born from your barren wife, from Sarah.

Before this, Abraham had reached the depths. There is a period of famine and he has to go down to Egypt, the land of plenty (see Gn 12:10-20). He goes down to Egypt because of the famine, and since he does things on his own without counting on God, he gets into terrible trouble. He lies and says that his wife is his sister so as not to get killed, but everything goes wrong for him.

By walking, Abraham has to learn to believe in God. He experiences in his life what it means to believe.

Abraham becomes God's friend. Before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, God visits Abraham in the form of three men.⁵ He wants to consult Abraham, as one consults a friend before making a decision. Abraham recognizes God in these three men, and forces them to stop to rest, to wash. He asks them not to pass by without stopping because it is not by chance that they have passed before him that day. Then Abraham bargains with God over the fate of these cities. In Sodom and Gomorrah there are not even ten just men. The three men promise Abraham that within one year he will have a son (see Gn 18).

And this is what happens. Sarah, his barren wife, has a son who is named Isaac, which means "laughter." For on that day Abraham and Sarah laughed with joy because at 90 years old he had a son from his barren wife (see Gn 21:1-7).

Later on, he idolizes this son so much that God asks Abraham to sacrifice him. God wants to help him because he has put himself in a very dangerous situation. God commands him to take his son and sacrifice him to God on Mount Moriah. Abraham goes up the mountain saying: God will provide. You already know what happens: when he is about to kill Isaac an angel of God

⁵ CCC 2571: Because Abraham believed in God and walked in his presence and in covenant with him, (Cf. Gen 15:6; 17:1f) the patriarch is ready to welcome a mysterious Guest into his tent. Abraham's remarkable hospitality at Mamre foreshadows the annunciation of the true Son of the promise (Cf. Gen 18:1-15; Lk 1:26-38). After that, once God had confided his plan, Abraham's heart is attuned to his Lord's compassion for men and he dares to intercede for them with bold confidence (Cf. Gen 18:16-33).

stops him and God provides a lamb caught in a bush for the sacrifice (see Gn 22:1-18).

Abraham established himself in Canaan. He dies full of years, riches and happiness (see Gn 25:7-10). In Abraham himself the promises of salvation begin to be fulfilled.

This is more or less the story of Abraham.

And now you can say to me: and so what does all this have to do with me? These are all things that happened a long time ago; but for me, what are they to me?

Well, I shall tell you what the Word of God is. You know this story. Why then have I told you all this? BECAUSE ABRAHAM IS YOU, BECAUSE ABRAHAM IS A WORD OF GOD FOR YOU, BECAUSE ABRAHAM IS YOU AND ME. BECAUSE ABRAHAM IS FAITH.

Do you want to know if you have faith? It is not enough that you were baptized as a child. All those who are in the jails were baptized when they were babies. And who says that they have faith? It is not enough that you have made your First Communion and that you go to Mass every Sunday. What is faith? ABRAHAM IS A WORD OF GOD FOR YOU. WITH ABRAHAM, GOD WANTS TO ENLIGHTEN YOUR REALITY AND WANTS TO TELL YOU WHAT FAITH IS. God does not give boring conferences or speeches to explain faith to tell you what faith is. To say what faith is, God gives us a word: Abraham, an historical person, an event.

When the Church reads this Word in the liturgy and says at the end: "The Word of the Lord," she does not do so to give you biblical knowledge or so that you can know what happened many years ago, but because this Word is of vital importance in your concrete life today: it is a Word for you today, because Abraham is you.

If you are Abraham, I would like to ask you a question to help you see what the Word of God is. I'm saying to you: this Word is for you; Abraham is you; the Word of God comes looking for you today; every time the Word of God is proclaimed it is looking for someone who will listen to it. The Word of God asks: Where are you? Are you inside the Word of God or outside of it? If you are outside, that is, if your life has nothing to do with this Word, since this is the truth, a revelation from God, this calls you to conversion. It invites you to enter here today. If you are here, this Word is judging you today, it is putting your life into perspective and is telling you: Have courage. This is the way.

Well, I would like to know now where this Word finds you, because you are Abraham. I would like to know when you were in Ur, that is, an idolater, (searching for happiness in money, work, the family, etc.). I would like to know if you, like Abraham, one day felt like a failure, because you were not happy, because you did not feel fulfilled, because you did not even know why you were living. Then I would ask you: Did you ever hear this God saying to you: I will give you the happiness that you are seeking: leave your country, your kinsfolk, your securities and your idols, and let us go together.

(QUESTIONS PUT TO THE PEOPLE)

12th day: Abraham

Sincerely, do you see yourself identified at some point with the story of Abraham? Do you see any parallel between Abraham's life and your life? In what part of this journey of Abraham do you find yourself today?

- in Ur?
- in the covenant?
- have you already received the fruit of the promise?
- what did God promise you?
- what is Isaac in your life?
- when did you hear this Word that Abraham heard: leave your country and your kinsfolk...?

I do not know if you have begun to realize a little how powerful and important the Word of God is.

Abraham is you. This Word is searching for you. It is not a matter of interpreting this Word as you please and saying: for me, Isaac is... This Word has a true interpretation and all the others are false. Each one cannot just interpret the Word of God as he pleases. It has only one interpretation, given by the Church and which I will tell you today in the name of the Church, because I am speaking here in the name of the Bishop. You cannot say: I think that God called me... I think that things are like this...

Let us see to what extent you are Abraham.

Abraham, we were saying, is a failure. Abraham is perhaps the most existential character in the Bible. This is so true that Kierkegaard, who is an existentialist, wrote a book about Abraham.

This figure is a Word of God for you today, an enlightenment of your reality today. God does not leave you alone and orphaned, but through this catechesis he wants to enlighten your reality, to put your life in perspective, so that then you can understand why your wife died, why you are a failure at your job, why you are not happy; so that you can understand your existential reality of today. Because God does not abandon men. This is why God's people, you, people of God, must live on the Word of God. This is why the food of Christians is the Word of God. Because "man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God" (see Mt 4:4; Dt 8:3). So without this Word you are blind, because you do not know why you feel unhappy at the office, because you do not understand why your girlfriend left you, you do not know why you are ill, you do not know why things go wrong, you do not know anything, you are blind, you need the light of a Word that will enlighten your reality.

Abraham is a Word which enlightens your reality today. It is a Word about faith.⁶ Do you want to know if you have faith or

⁶ CCC 145: The *Letter to the Hebrews*, in its great eulogy of the

not? Look at yourself in Abraham. If this Word is fulfilled in you today then you have faith; but if you find yourself outside of this Word, begin to think that you need conversion, that is, begin to think that this Word is inviting you to enter into it. Because the sons of Abraham are not those born of the flesh. Abraham had two sons, one from the slave and the other from the free woman, and the one who inherited the promise was not the son of the flesh, the son of his reason, but the son born of faith, the son which God had promised he would have with his barren wife (see Gal 4:22-31).

This is why St. Paul says to the Jews, who were all puffed up with pride because they were sons of Abraham, because they were descendants according to the flesh: this Word is not accomplished in you just because you were born in Palestine of Hebrew blood and were brought up in Judaism, or because you know your religion very well and go to the temple everyday: you are sons of Abraham if you have the faith of Abraham (see Rm 2:17-29; 4:16; Gal 3:6-9).

The Church says the same thing today. You are not an adult Christian just because you were baptized when you were little and were born into a Christian family, or because you go to Mass and Communion every Sunday. You are an adult Christian, a son of Abraham, if you have the faith of Abraham. You are not a Christian through the flesh, but through faith.

And so St. Paul says: If there is a people who believe, even if they are Gentiles and uncircumcised, but trust in God as Abraham did, and who has started out on a journey as he did, these are sons of Abraham.

Abraham is a man who is searching for happiness. What are you searching for in this life? Happiness: to be fulfilled, to be. Abraham has tried but he has not succeeded. He has done many things in his life, but now that he is old he does not find meaning in his life. He has tried with his strength, with his reason, with his intelligence, with his knowledge, just as you have tried, and I have tried, to give sense to his life. He got married, he has struggled, he has suffered, he has worked like a slave, but still he has reached an age when he realizes that none of this has given him happiness.

faith of Israel's ancestors, lays special emphasis on Abraham's faith: "By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go" (Heb 11:8; cf. Gen 12:1-4). By faith, he lived as a stranger and pilgrim in the promised land (Cf. Gen 23:4). By faith, Sarah was given to conceive the son of the promise. And by faith Abraham offered his only son in sacrifice (Cf. Heb 11:17).

CCC 146: Abraham thus fulfills the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1): "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3; cf. Gen 15:6). Because he was "strong in his faith," Abraham became the "father of all who believe" (Rom 4:11, 18; 4:20; cf. Gen 15:5).

I was in Florence once living in an old people's home, while I was giving catecheses in the town. It was a home for people who had worked in the circus. There I saw the figure of Abraham in the moment in which he appears in the Bible brought to life. Here were people who had lived with their children, their brothers and sisters, their wives, taking the circus around from place to place. We were eating and living with them, and we blessed God because it was a great catechesis, the one they gave us. Four days after we arrived, one of these old men committed suicide. Just imagine these people who had worked like crazy, who had struggled in life, who had had children and had put their happiness in their children, in their wives, in their work, in their lives and one day they find that they are old, walking with a stick very slowly, sitting in the sun all day, waiting for the nuns to ring the bell at mealtimes. And they go to eat but they can only eat certain things.

Seeing these old men, I said to myself: this old man here, who has had so many dreams, what must he be thinking now? This man was once young, proud, he has beaten his sons, he has struggled, he has made money, he has envied, and now he finds himself here sitting on a chair with no one to come and see him, knowing that he will never leave this place and that each winter many of them die. What must he be thinking about his life? What is the meaning of everything he has done? What use has it been to him? What has he lived for?

This is a bit like the figure of Abraham: an old man who feels he is a failure, almost at the point of suicide. He is at the point where he almost does not want to work anymore because he finds his life without meaning.

Yet to this man God says: I SHALL GIVE YOUR LIFE MEANING.

If this is a Word of God, it is not only for Abraham. TODAY GOD SPEAKS THIS WORD TO YOU. This is why the Church proclaims it today.

It says: IF TODAY, TONIGHT, HERE, THERE IS SOMEONE WHO FINDS HIMSELF LIKE ABRAHAM, WHOSE LIFE IS A FAILURE AND WITHOUT MEANING, WHO IS TIRED AND UNHAPPY, TONIGHT GOD IS SAYING TO HIM: I SHALL GIVE A MEANING TO YOUR LIFE, I SHALL GIVE YOU HAPPINESS: COME WITH ME, I SHALL GIVE YOU WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.

These catecheses, brothers and sisters, are a call from God to all those who are in Ur, a call to leave, to set out on the way. BECAUSE ABRAHAM IS ALSO THE FIGURE OF THE CATECHUMENATE.

Because Abraham is a man who has to learn to believe. Because faith is not something magical which arrives in an instant. Faith is something one has to learn by walking: FAITH IS A WAY. Faith has to be purified and matured. Abraham must learn to believe. This is why God makes him do this long way.

Through this catechesis God is calling you, like Abraham, to get out of Ur and to start walking. If you have put your security in money, in the family, in your children, in your wife, and truly you do not feel fulfilled, God invites you to leave your securities, your clan (not physically) and to put your trust not in them, but in him. He is inviting you to

believe in a promise.⁷ In these catecheses, we have promised you that during the catechumenate you will receive the assurance of the resurrection, that you will not die, that you will enter the promised land, that in you Jesus Christ will be born, who will do works of eternal life in you, so that you let yourself be killed by the other, loving the enemy. You know that Palestine is the symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven. Well, here you are promised that you will enter the promised land, the land that the risen Jesus Christ has already entered, which is eternity. Jesus entered into divinity, into eternity, with his human nature. In Jesus Christ mankind has overcome death. A man can be poor or rich. If death has not been overcome, if this humanity ends in death and everything decomposes and rots, then tell me what life is worth. Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die (see 1 Cor 15:32; Is 22:13).

This promise has been made to you here. Tonight, the Word of God invites you to believe in God, to set out on the way leaning on God⁸; it invites you to believe that God is the one who can draw life from the dead womb which is you, who are barren of good works; that God can draw forth life. He can make you be born again and transform your life. This Word invites you to believe that from the death you have inside you, you are dead because you do not have life, because you find life has no meaning, because you have not succeeded in getting rid of your selfishness, because you absolutely do not succeed in finding happiness through what you bring to birth, because you are not able to project your life beyond yourself, because you cannot get out of the pit, no matter what you do, because you will experience physical corruption no matter what you do. Yet, from all of this, God can bring forth life. From your sterility of works of eternal life, he can make a son be born which will be your happiness. This son is called Isaac. Isaac is the figure of

⁷ CCC 706: Against all human hope, God promises descendants to Abraham, as the fruit of faith and of the power of the Holy Spirit (Cf. Gen 18:1-15; Lk 1:26-38. 54-55; Jn 1:12-13; Rom 4:16-21). In Abraham's progeny all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This progeny will be Christ himself (Cf. Gen 12:3; Gal 3:16), in whom the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will "gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Cf. Jn 11:52). God commits himself by his own solemn oath to giving his beloved Son and "the promised Holy Spirit... [who is] the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Eph 1:13-14; cf. Gen 22:17-19; Lk 1:73; Jn 3:16; Rom 8:32; Gal 3:14).

⁸ CCC 2570: When God calls him, Abraham goes forth "as the Lord had told him" (Gen 12:4): Abraham's heart is entirely submissive to the Word and so he obeys.

CCC 144: To obey (from the Latin ob-audire, to "hear or listen to") in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself. Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture. The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment.

Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, Isaac is Jesus Christ: he who climbs the mountain with the wood on his back.

For Abraham to have descendants means to carry on living through this son. For you to have descendants will be to have eternal life, to have the risen Christ inside you. This is what we have promised here.

We do not want to cheat anyone here. Those who will continue here in this catechumenate are the ones who really (at the end) will have the Spirit of Jesus and love like Jesus. But you will not do this yourselves because you cannot.

This is why the catechumenate is a period of gestation during which the Holy Spirit will be given to you. We shall teach you to have faith, to believe, we shall lead you along the way.

Abraham had to learn to walk just as you will have to learn to walk, often abandoned only to this Word that we have promised you. And when this first part, these catecheses, is finished, we shall go away and leave you to walk for a year with only this promise which you have received like Abraham: that you will have a son, that is you will find complete happiness. And it will be a marvelous time for you. Then we shall come back and you will experience something new.

You will have the same experience as Abraham: Abraham does not rely on God and everything goes wrong. He goes to Egypt and gets into a terrible mess. But these blows to the head make him experience that when he relies on God everything goes well, but that when he trusts himself... Because God fulfills his promises. God is not a liar. You will learn this too. You will experience that what we promised you will truly be realized in your life.

Just think, brothers and sisters, how Jesus Christ can be found in all the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is everything that the Scriptures announce. And Abraham basically announces the same thing as Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God made flesh.

Jesus Christ says of Abraham: ABRAHAM SAW MY DAY AND LAUGHED (see Jn 8:56-58). I could ask you: When did Abraham see the day of Jesus Christ? The Pharisees who heard Christ say this, say to him: You're crazy! You're not yet fifty and you say that Abraham saw your day. Aren't we right in saying that you are possessed by the devil? Who do you think you are? Don't say stupid things!

Jesus says: Abraham saw my day and laughed. Abraham truly saw the day of Jesus Christ and saw his work. What is the work of Jesus Christ? To let himself be killed by the sins of all men, to enter into death trusting that God would not abandon him to the pit; and God resurrected him from the dead for our justification. This is the work of Jesus Christ. When did Abraham see this? When he had Isaac. Abraham saw with his own eyes that Yahweh God, the God of the Scriptures (there is not one God of the Old Testament and one of the New Testament) from the dead womb of his wife, from death, God takes out life, fulfilling what he promised. And he saw this and he laughed.

Faith does not mean to believe something blindfolded, it is not to believe something while being uncertain whether it is true or not. For Abraham, faith is to take his son, to hug him in his arms and to laugh. Those of you who have children, do you remember when your first child was born? It is a strange experience. Well, imagine what Abraham must have thought when he had his son whom he had always wanted but had never managed to have; imagine what he must have felt to have him now when he was 90 years old and his wife was barren.

Many important women of the Scriptures are barren women so that the glory of God may shine forth, so that no one can claim the glory of God for himself and say that this has come about through his merits because he has responded very well. This is so that no one can think that it was because of his merits. Abraham has nothing. God did not elect him because he was good or better than anyone else. Just as God is not choosing you because you are the best one. On the contrary, says St. Paul, God always chooses the worst to confound the world. He chooses the most sinful and lowly, to confuse those who think that they are somebody (see 1 Cor 1:26-29).

Abraham saw the day of Jesus Christ and laughed. You too will see it and will laugh. I tell you this: during this way you will see what we have announced to you. You will see that your life will really have a marvelous meaning; that you will be able to love all men as Jesus Christ loved them; that you will have Jesus living in you; that your life will have a profound meaning; that eternal life, the Shekinah, the presence of God, will put down its tent in you, and you will really be the temple of God. And all this you will receive gratis, because God loves you and wants to give you a marvelous life forever. You will experience this in the catechumenal way, just as Abraham and the Holy Virgin experienced it.

For Christianity is not a form of torture. Jesus did not come to torture anyone. He did not come to say: Sacrifice yourselves, sinners, suffer and bear it as I suffered. Don't let anyone say anything of the sort. Jesus Christ came to suffer so that you do not suffer. He has come to die so that you do not die. He is the one who dies, not you; so that life is given freely to you and to the most miserable wretch on this earth, to the worst sinner, to the most vicious man, to the murderer; to anyone whoever he is, eternal life that never ends is given freely.

Look what St. Paul says about Abraham: "Abraham, hoping against all hope, believed, and was made the father of many generations, according to what God had told him: 'Your descendants will be as numerous as these.' He did not waver in his faith at the sight of his body already without vigor. He was already old, he was a hundred years old, says St. Paul, and the womb of Sarah was equally barren. HE DID NOT WAVER IN THE PRESENCE OF THE DIVINE PROMISE (God had said to him: I swear to you that your wife will have a son, although she is barren; and you who are old will have a land. God did not make this oath to Abraham alone, God made it for you as well.) DISBELIEF DID NOT MAKE HIM WAVER; ON THE CONTRARY, HIS FAITH FILLED HIM WITH STRENGTH AND HE GAVE GLORY TO GOD, CONVINCED THAT GOD IS SO

POWERFUL HE CAN FULFILL WHAT HE PROMISES. THIS WAS CONSIDERED BY HIM AS JUSTICE, AS SALVATION. And the Scriptures do not say that only for him alone was this counted as making him just, but also for us to whom faith has been imparted, for us who believe in him who raised Jesus Christ our Lord from among the dead, who was handed over for our sins and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:18-25).

St. Paul says that Abraham gave glory to God. Do you know what it means to give glory to God? It means to have this faith of Abraham: to believe that God is so great that from an old, failed man, from a barren woman, he can draw out life. He believed because God had made him the promise. You will give glory to God if you believe that of you, who are a sinner, selfish, lustful, attached to money, God can make a son of God, who loves like Jesus Christ does. Do you believe this? God will do it, not you. THAT IS WHY CHRISTIANITY IS GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR AND THE WRETCHED. Christianity does not demand anything from anyone. It gives everything as a gift.

The fact that Abraham believed that God would fulfill the promise was considered as his justification. But the Scriptures do not say this only for him but also for you who believe the promises we announce to you now: believe that God is able to transform your life, believe that God loves you so much that he can make you a new man, believe that Christ died for your sins and rose for your justification.

Jesus Christ rose to prove to you that your sins are forgiven; so that alive and risen he can live in you and forgive you. Because he made himself sin in your place (2 Cor 15:45). If he made himself sin in your place, he has also died and risen again in your place; and now that he is risen he wants to come to give you his own life. We announced to you, brothers and sisters, that the first man was called living-soul, the second man is JESUS RISEN, SPIRIT WHO GIVES LIFE (see 1 Cor 15:45). Christ has been constituted the firstborn of a new creation. Jesus Christ can give life. You, too, will be transformed into spirits who give life, and you will be able to give life to men, like I am giving you life now, through the Word of God given to me. He, the Lord, will give it to you and you will give life to other brothers and sisters.

This Spirit who gives life, who is Jesus Christ, is not an isolated individual. Jesus is total love for all men. This is why the best way of understanding the new creation that God has made is the Church, is the Community. Because Jesus, this new man, loves in a way which has a new dimension: He is the first born of a new creation which God wants to do in him for many men; for you, too. He wants you to have this new life. The risen Jesus is in a place that God has prepared for you and me, so that your life may have a marvelous direction and meaning. But God does not want your life to acquire this meaning only at the end, but already today. So he helps you by telling you what faith is. He is enlightening you today about what your way will be.

God is calling you, like Abraham, from Ur. And he is promising you something. You will have to start walking. And

what happened to Abraham will happen to you: this son will be born. And perhaps sometimes your faith will have to be tested because perhaps you too may become too attached to your faith. God says to Abraham: Take your son Isaac and go up to the mountain and sacrifice him to me there. It is God who says this to Abraham.

Many people have a very sweet sort of idea of God. They think that God is "good and sweet" according to their style of thinking. We are deceived by the false holy pictures for First Communions. A lady once said to me: Ah, when you speak gently, you seem like Jesus Christ to me, but not when you begin to shout... For we think that Jesus Christ was all syrup and sugar with plucked eyebrows and with the hands like this... be careful! We are going to de-mystify certain ideas of God; otherwise we can never understand the God of the Bible, who is the same God who manifested himself in Jesus, who is a powerful God. Jesus Christ gets angry and says to the Pharisees: Brood of vipers, you are all whitened sepulchers outside but full of rot and filth on the inside (see Mt 23:27). I do not think that when he spoke like this he did so very sweetly...

What I want to say with this is that perhaps we have a particular idea of God and we say: how can God ask a father to sacrifice his son? We cannot understand it, because we want to create a sweet God for ourselves. But God is as he wants to be, he does not have to be as you want him to be. Because God is superior to you. He transcends you. You cannot put God into your little head, because if God could fit into your reason, you would not serve him, because no one serves someone smaller than himself. We can only possess God in the greatest measure in which he can be possessed: in hope.

God commands Abraham: "Go up Mount Moriah and sacrifice your son to me." Because Abraham, whom God loves, had put himself in such a position that he was beginning to doubt, and he had the capability of not doing the will of God, because of the exclusive love he has for this son. This is something that can happen to you. See if this is the same God in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. If God tells Abraham to kill his son, just see what Jesus Christ says: "Whoever does not hate his son, his father, his mother, his wife, his own life, cannot be my disciple" (see Lk 14:26). "Whoever does not hate his father is not worthy of me." This translation "hate" is a literal translation. With this expression Jesus spoke paradoxically. Anyone who puts something above Jesus Christ and his will recognizes an idol as the highest god, as the only truth. And so he will always put the love he has for his wife or for himself above everything else. And if God says to you: Go there and you say: My wife says no... and since your love for your wife is greater, you will not obey God. So your wife is your god.

The same thing happens to Abraham with his son. And the only way he can be saved is by doing what God asks him to do. Because God not only promised this son but also descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky. But he begins to think: what if all this has only been chance and God does not exist? Because perhaps also another old man like me can have a son. Abraham is

attached to his son and his situation is dangerous. And since God loves him, he will purify his faith, he will give his faith a new impulse. And Abraham obeys.⁹

God begins to save Abraham starting from the position he is in, which is his desire to have a son and land. Perhaps with you, too, God first begins to help you by giving you a family and children and money. But the happiness that God wants to give you is much greater than this, it goes far beyond this.

One of the problems God has with you and with me is that the happiness that we ask for is the one we imagine, and what happens is that the happiness that God wants to give us is much greater than we could ever imagine. God fights against this. But, come on! If the only happiness that God has prepared for us were the one we imagine is right for us...! Because man constantly flattens and minimizes his life. That is why God continually comes to the aid of man. And when you say: I am already happy; I have a good career, a good job, I have beautiful children and lots of money, a lovely car and a house in the country; I already have everything... Well, perhaps your sixth child is born retarded; or one of your sons is killed in a crash on the motorbike you bought him when he finished school.

God cannot allow you to flatten your life and make it small so that you become bourgeois, living a small, petty life, when what God wants to give you is much more than this. He does not want you to sit yourself down; he wants you to walk further. He wants to lead you to question yourself about life.

The happiness God wants to give you is much greater. Perhaps the idea you yourself have made about what you want is preventing you from having greater happiness, because you become satisfied with rubbish. You are satisfied with being a slave. This is also what happened to the people of Israel who were slaves in Egypt and did not want to follow Moses; they had gotten used to being slaves. That is why God does not allow man to become paralyzed, but sets him in motion through certain events.

I once saw a Japanese film by Kurosawa called: *Ikiru* (Living). It's about a man who has worked in an office all his life, for thirty years, and his only concern has been to lead this routine life of work. He lives with his two sons because his wife has died. He lives only for his sons because they are the only thing he has. Do you know what happens to him? He goes to the doctor and discovers that he has stomach cancer. He is destroyed. He goes home and without putting the light on, he sits on a chair lost in thought. Then his children come in and they talk about when their father will die so that they can inherit his savings. All of a sudden his whole life collapses.

⁹ CCC 1819: Christian hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the hope of Abraham, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God fulfilled in Isaac, and who was purified by the test of the sacrifice

(Cf. Gen 17:4-8; 22:1-18). "Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations" (Rom 4:18).

All that he has done has been of no use because his sons have never loved him. All that he saved is no good now that he has cancer and he has only a few months of life left. Everything collapses on top of him. So he decides to live and enjoy himself in the time he has left.

Abraham obeys and climbs up the mountain. His son asks: where is the victim? And Abraham says: God will provide.

This is a Word of God. Imagine this poor old man who must have made the journey with a broken heart. He must have said: How is it possible that God can command me to do this? How can he order me to destroy my son? This paradox forces Abraham to transcend his reason: He does not understand anything, but he thinks that God is powerful and that he will provide.

The Letter to the Hebrews says: Abraham believed that God was so powerful that he could raise his son to life again (see Heb 11:9).¹⁰ This is why nothing happens to a man of faith when a child dies. He knows how to trust: he does not fret because things do not go as he thinks they should. We all want to have everything that happens to us explained to us; we want God at our service. Abraham says: God will provide.

This is a Word of God. How does God provide? God, in front of the event of death, provides a lamb. Look what an event of death Abraham has: he has to sacrifice his son. But God provides a lamb: THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SINS OF THE WORLD. Jesus Christ is the lamb of God that God has provided for all your events of death.¹¹ Imagine that your fiancée leaves you and you are destroyed. Why does God permit this? Why does God permit the cancer my wife has? Why does God allow my son to die? Why is there death and suffering? You demand that this be explained to you because you just do not understand it. The cross is the symbol of death. And people say: Why, if God is so good, does he allow children to die of hunger? THE CROSS SCANDALIZES THE WORLD.

The cross is what destroys us. The crosses that you have everyday: the work that you do not like, the fact that you have no money, which you have to live with your mother-in-law,

¹⁰ CCC 2572: As a final stage in the purification of his faith, Abraham, "who had received the promises" (Heb 11:17), is asked to sacrifice the son God had given him. Abraham's faith does not weaken ("God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering"), for he "considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead" (Gen 22:8; Heb 11:19). And so the father of believers is conformed to the likeness of the Father who will not spare his own Son but will deliver him up for us all (Rom 8:32).

¹¹ CCC 422: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5). This is "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1): God has visited his people. He has fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham and his descendants. He acted far beyond all expectation -- he has sent his own "beloved Son" (Mk 1:11; cf. Lk 1:55, 68).

everything that destroys you is your cross.

And in front of the cross, what is God's reply? To make it glorious. The cross is glorious and radiant. Because God provides. Because in fact Jesus says: Everything is written (see Lk 24:44) BECAUSE FROM DEATH AND EVIL THE LORD DRAWS OUT LIFE AND GOOD. BECAUSE GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR YOUR CROSS, FOR THE EVENT OF DEATH THAT YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND: JESUS CHRIST RISEN. IN HIM, THIS CROSS NO LONGER KILLS YOU BUT GLORIFIES YOU.

Because we know that death has been overcome. Whoever has eternal life knows that he will never die, even if crosses arrive, even if diseases and suffering arrive; he knows that he does not die. There can be a war; he is calm, peaceful and happy. I can assure you of this. I have seen a thirty-year-old woman who was in bed all her life who was happier than me. I have seen a leper without faith who committed suicide.

The cross is the cornerstone. For some, it is the rock on which they build their house. For others, it is the stone which falls on top of them and crushes them (see Mk 12:10; Ps 118:22) Some people commit suicide because of it and others find the face of God in it, because through it they discover that they are limited, that they cannot do anything, but that there is one who saves them. Abraham had a very big cross. Through this cross he was able to discover that God exists and that he is the one who, gratis, saves and helps the old, the failures, the dead, the sinners and the idiots.

THIRTEENTH DAYEXODUS

Catechism of the Catholic Church: Moses (62, 72, 77, 204-206, 208, 210, 401, 446, 581, 1961, 2575, 2576); Israel, people of God (62-64, 201, 228, 238, 287, 333, 431, 436, 446, 751, 762, 1334, 1363, 1611, 1612, 1961, 2085, 2129, 2170-2171); God reveals his name (203-213, 2810); God is truth and love (214-221); Jesus and Israel (574-594).

(This catechesis was given in the parish of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers in Madrid, April 1972.)

(Kiko)

Last time we said that in these final catecheses we were trying to give a brief initiation into the Word of God, discovering a little how the Kerygma, the Good News, was already announced, promised and even in part realized, through the events that God carried out with the people of Israel. Therefore, this history that God made with his people announces and encloses a promise that comes to complete fulfillment in our Lord Jesus.

We were saying that we do not want to make a systematic exposition or give a biblical study course on the history of salvation, but only to give a brief outline of two biblical themes to help you get a little glimpse of the marvels of the Word of God so that you can taste this Word before receiving the Bible from the hands of the bishop. Before you give your adherence to this Word you need to taste it, to eat it, to see a little bit that it fulfills itself in you.

We have seen in the last catechesis how Abraham is a Word of God for us. Abraham was chosen by God to be the father of many generations. Abraham received the promise that he would have a son and land. The announcement of this promise started him on the way. We have seen how God has fulfilled his promises in Abraham and how he is a word of God that means faith.

Abraham went on a journey to learn to believe and so we have seen that faith is a way. Whoever wants to know what faith is must look at this Word of God that is Abraham because faith is not acquired magically, but it is a way. You have to learn to believe by making a journey that is the catechumenate.

God promised Abraham descendants: And in your descendants all the nations of the world will be blessed. On top of that, he promised him a large, spacious land. God began to fulfill these promises in Abraham, as we have seen, but he did not completely fulfill them in Abraham. This promise that God made to Abraham was passed on to his son Isaac.

God's blessing falls on Isaac. He will carry these promises enclosed in his heart because God is going to act in him. Isaac means "the Servant," who is sacrificed, who sees the glory of God in the bush when his father is about to sacrifice him. All these figures of the patriarchs are very important Words of God,

but I cannot spend time on them because today I want to speak about the Exodus.

Isaac has two sons: Esau and Jacob.

Jacob will inherit the promises made to his father. It won't be Esau, who had the right of the firstborn. You know how Esau sells his birthright to his brother for a plate of lentils (see Gen 25:29-34).

You also remember how when Isaac is old and blind, he is deceived by his wife Rebecca and by Jacob so that Isaac's blessing falls on Jacob. In order for Jacob to take Esau's place they use goatskins (see Gen 27).

You cannot play games with the birthright. It is as if God has chosen you as firstborn with his son Jesus Christ and you go and sell your birthright so that it passes to someone else.

Jacob is a very important Word of God for Israel. It is the name (Jacob-Israel) that perhaps appears most often in the Scriptures. What does Jacob mean for you and me today? As does every Word of God, Jacob is looking for you today to see if you are inside it or outside it. Jacob means election. God elected Jacob and rejected Esau because he wanted it so (see Rm 9:10-13). No one can demand explanations from God (see Rm 9:14-24).

This Word is very important because if you look at Jacob, you see that he is no model of perfection. On the contrary, he is a liar, something of a thief, a rival: he usurps the place of his brother by taking advantage of his brother's tiredness. Instead, Esau is courageous, a hunter. Jacob is rather treacherous and sly, but, despite this, God elects Jacob. Why? Because Jacob represents everything that the people of God are. God did not elect the people of God because they were good but because they were far worse than all the other peoples: a group of slaves. God elected the people whom no one loved, as his people.

This Word of God, when later on the people betray it, tell lies and want to blackmail God and are false and lying, this Word appears before Israel. When the sins of the people threaten to make them think that God has rejected them, behold, the people have here a word called Jacob, which continues to save them and continues to say to them: I have elected you and I continue to elect you. And my election will never be cancelled: it stays.

This is very important. Do you think that the Israel of the flesh, those in the synagogue in Madrid, have been rejected by God? Not at all. This people is the true olive tree, says St. Paul; we are the oleaster, the wild olive: we are Gentiles. God has allowed this people to reject Jesus Christ so that the nations, us, the Gentiles, could enter, but at the end Israel will be saved. And if the fall of Israel has been salvation for the nations, what a great thing the conversion of this people will be (see Rm 11:11-36)! This people that has rejected the Messiah is an event that speaks to us constantly. In fact they refused the Messiah so that the Scriptures could be fulfilled, the Scriptures which say: I shall harden your hearts so that you will not be converted, so that seeing you will not see and hearing you will not hear (see Is 6:9-10).

Jacob, you will see in the Scriptures, fights with God (see Gen 32:23-33). Now you will understand what the name of Israel means. Jacob has a fight with an angel, he fights with God. One night, a strange figure appears to him and he fights with him throughout the night until dawn. Jacob discovers the immense strength of the one with whom he is fighting. Jacob discovers that it is someone superior to him, because he overcomes him. Then Jacob clings to him and he doesn't want to let him go until he blesses him. The angel, who must go because dawn is coming, tells him to let him go, but Jacob insists: I will not let you go until you bless me. Why does Jacob want the angel to bless him? Because he has discovered that the angel is stronger than he is and he wants him as an ally. Since Israel believes in the efficaciousness of the Word, Jacob knows that if this unknown one blesses him, the blessing will be fulfilled. The angel frees himself by touching Jacob's hip joint and leaving him lame. But he blesses Jacob saying: No longer will you be called Jacob but Israel, which means: STRONG WITH GOD.

Jacob and his descendants will be stronger than any other people, because they have fought with God and they have discovered their weakness and they have discovered with it the powerful strength of God who has become their ally. In a war, a nation is powerful depending on the allies it has. The people of Israel are the strongest of all peoples because they have God as an ally; they are the people of God: "You will be strong because you will lean on God; so you will overcome all your enemies." This blessing is always fulfilled in Israel.

This blessing has passed on to us who are the new Israel. We are called to form a people that will destroy all their enemies because the power of God is with us. This is how it will be if we have fought with God and we have discovered his strength and our weakness. Do not worry about your weakness because you know to whom to turn, who is the powerful one and the strong one. The true Israel is not the one that has the name, but the one in which this word ISRAEL is fulfilled and realized.

This Word is for us today too. It is looking for us and wants to tell us something. Every man, you and I, is fighting with God and wants to overcome God. But man is always overcome by God. This reveals our weakness, our sin. And he who has discovered his weakness has also discovered that there is someone more powerful than he is: he has discovered that he is not God. This word invites us to trust in God, to lean on God, to be strong in God so that this Word, Israel, may be fulfilled in us.

As you know, Jacob has twelve sons. The promises will fall on Joseph. Just as Jacob means election, Joseph means the servant of Yahweh, the suffering servant.

Everything goes wrong for Joseph. First, because of the charism of interpreting dreams that God gives him (see Gen 37:5-11), the envy of all his brothers is aroused and they sell him to some merchants, thinking that they will never see him again (see Gen 37:12-36). The forces of evil ally themselves against Joseph. Then he is taken to the house of Potiphar whose wife

wants to go to bed with him. Since he does not fall, she accuses him falsely and he is imprisoned (see Gen 39:7-20). This is the deep kenosis that Joseph goes through. Behind the figure of Joseph we can see the figure of Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ will be the true Servant.

But God will look upon this servant and will take him out of the darkest abysses, out of the greatest depths, raising him up to the highest place, to the extent of making him the firstborn, the greatest, the prime minister of Egypt (see Gen 41:37-46). This is the figure of Christ: Christ has descended for us to the point of making himself a worm. The forces of evil have allied themselves against him and killed him. But God takes him out of death and makes him the firstborn, the Kyrios and Lord over all the powers of heaven and earth.

You know what happens then. Joseph's brothers have to go down to Egypt because of a great famine (see Gen 42:1-3). Just imagine: Joseph is the cornerstone. The stone that had been rejected by the builders (his brothers had sold him as a slave) becomes the cornerstone of the building (he becomes salvation for all his brothers). This, prophesied in Joseph, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Joseph's brothers were starving, but thanks to their brother who was prime minister they receive enough grain to satisfy them, they come to live in Egypt and are given great lands. In this way a group of Hebrews, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, enter Egypt (see Gen 46:28-47:12). You know that this people grows and flourishes for 400 years. Here Genesis finishes and Exodus begins.

After the death of Joseph, there are new Pharaohs who don't consider the Hebrews anymore. In addition to this, the Egyptians begin to get worried about this people's extraordinary progress and they begin to enslave them, to put them in the last place (see Ex 1:8-14).

When they appear in the Exodus after 400 years, the situation is chaotic; the life of a Hebrew is no longer worth anything; the law does not forbid the killing of Hebrews. The Hebrews are obliged to make bricks by mixing mud with straw and pounding the mixture. They were condemned as slaves to do this very tiring work. They led a wretched life where they were worth less than animals. So we find the descendants of the patriarchs in the slavery of Egypt.¹ For 400 years God has not spoken to them because he has prepared a plan of salvation for them. God has allowed them to become slaves. This slavery is the prototype of all slaveries.

The culmination of these evils is that Pharaoh orders the killing of all the Hebrew male newborn babies (Ex 1:15-22).

¹ CCC 762: The remote preparation for this gathering together of the People of God begins when he calls Abraham and promises that he will become the father of a great people (see Gen 12:2; 15:5-6). Its immediate preparation begins with Israel's election as the People of God. By this election, Israel is to be the sign of the future gathering of all nations (see Ex 19:5-6; Dt 7:6; Is 2:2-5; Mic 4:1-4).

I tell the facts quickly. Pay attention to the events that happen to this people because they are a Word of God for us. They are not just past history. The history of this people is your history and my history. EXODUS is a Word of God for you.

One baby is saved from the waters: Moses. Once again, water signifies the death from which Moses is saved. The daughter of Pharaoh takes this child and he grows up in the court of Pharaoh (see Ex 2:1-10). When he becomes an adult, Moses discovers the oppression to which his people is subject and one day he kills an Egyptian who was fighting with a Hebrew. Then he tries to make peace between two Hebrews and he is rejected. He has to flee because it has become known that he has killed an Egyptian (see Ex 2:11-15).

He runs away to Midian and marries the daughter of Jethro (Ex 2:15-22). One day God reveals himself to him through a bush that is burning but is not consumed (see Ex 3). He hears a voice that says to him: Take off your sandals because this ground you are treading is holy!² After 400 years God appears again. Moses asks him: Who are you? And God says to him: I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob. Moses wants to know his name and God says to him: I AM WHO I AM (I am He who will be, I am He who will manifest myself; you will know who I am by the things that I shall do).³ Moses receives the mission of saving his people

² CCC 208: Faced with God's fascinating and mysterious presence, man discovers his own insignificance. Before the burning bush, Moses takes off his sandals and veils his face in the presence of God's holiness (see Ex 3:5-6). Before the glory of the thrice-holy God, Isaiah cries out: "Woe is me! I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips" (Is 6:5). Before the divine signs wrought by Jesus, Peter exclaims: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk 5:8). But because God is holy, he can forgive the man who realizes that he is a sinner before him: "I will not execute my fierce anger... for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst" (Hos 11:9). The apostle John says likewise: "We shall... reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything" (1 Jn 3:19-20).

³ CCC 204: God revealed himself progressively and under different names to his people, but the revelation that proved to be the fundamental one for both the Old and the New Covenants was the revelation of the divine name to Moses in the theophany of the burning bush, on the threshold of the Exodus and of the covenant on Sinai.

CCC 205: God calls Moses from the midst of a bush that burns without being consumed: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). God is the God of the fathers, the One who had called and guided the patriarchs in their wanderings. He is the faithful and compassionate God who remembers them and his promises; he comes to free their descendants from slavery. He is the God who, from beyond space and time, can do this and wills to do it, the God who will put his almighty power to work for this plan. "I Am who I Am" Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you' and

from slavery so that they can go into the desert to worship their God.⁴ Moses refuses to go because he has a stutter. (Another very important thing about election; someone can say: Why has God elected me if I am like this or like that? God elects whomever he wants.) Moses receives a helper, his brother Aaron and he is convinced by a series of wonders which God enables him to do: he throws a staff to the ground where it becomes a serpent; he puts his hand in his pocket and takes it out covered in leprosy; etc. And, above all, God says to him: I shall speak for you, I will be with you.

Moses goes back to Egypt and asks Pharaoh to let the people go into the desert to worship their God. For the oppression was also religious. It was the time of the spring feasts, the feast of Passover (the passage from the death of winter to the life of spring). Moses asks for three days to go into the desert to celebrate these feasts. The Pharaoh refuses permission and Moses performs wonders to convince him. God acts on his people's behalf. The last disaster is the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians, both people and animals (see Ex 5-12).

GOD ACTS WITH WONDERS TO BREAK THIS CIRCLE OF SLAVERY THAT KEEPS THE PEOPLE IN ITS GRIP. Imagine what this presupposes: that the slaves, who were the basis of the national economy, may freely leave the country. Humanly speaking, it is impossible to break this circle. GOD BREAKS IT ON BEHALF OF HIS PEOPLE. The Egyptians are dumbfounded and even give them money to go away.

You know how God commands the people to celebrate the feast of Passover on this night (the feast of the passage of God who takes his people out of slavery) with their loins girded and in haste. THIS NIGHT IS THE PASSOVER OF YAHWEH. THIS NIGHT YAHWEH

they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'... this is my name forever and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations" (Ex 3:13-15).

CCC 207: By revealing his name God at the same time reveals his faithfulness which is from everlasting to everlasting, valid for the past ("I am the God of your fathers"), as for the future ("I will be with you") (Ex 3:6, 12). God, who reveals his name as "I AM," reveals himself as the God who is always there, present to his people in order to save them.

⁴ CCC 2575: Here again the initiative is God's... 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 (see Ex 14:5-9).

PASSES WITH POWERFUL HAND AND OUTSTRETCHED ARM TO FREE HIS PEOPLE AND TO DESTROY THE ENEMY.

You remember the details of the feast: the year-old lamb, the unleavened bread made with the first ears of grain, the blood of the lamb on the doorposts or the tent cords. The angel of Yahweh passes, killing all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians and saving all those in the houses of the Hebrews.

So this people escapes from the slavery of Egypt and they begin a way of freedom (see Ex 13:17-14:4). They walk with all their cattle and their belongings. They do not know where they are going. Moses leads them. It is not just one man who walks. IT IS A WHOLE PEOPLE THAT WALKS IN A CARAVAN, TOWARDS FREEDOM, WITH A LEADER IN THEIR MIDST.

The Pharaoh begins to think about what has happened: now who will make the bricks and build the houses? Moreover, he is enraged by the disaster he has suffered because of this people.

He organizes the army and goes to look for them to force them to come back. The people find themselves between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army. There is no way out. They already hear the noise of the chariots. Once again they are encircled. The people begin to despair and they complain against God and against Moses: Wretch! Murderer! Criminal! You've brought us out of Egypt to have us all die here. If we were badly off before, what will happen now when they catch us again They want to stone Moses. They will want to kill poor Moses many times because the people will always doubt. They will never believe in anything (see Ex 14:10-14).

Moses appeals to God and God says to him: Touch the sea with your staff and the waters will open so that you can pass through. And that's what happens. THE SEA OPENS (see Ex 14:15-31).

This people is the type of humanity. Everything that happens to this people will happen to mankind. It is a people that constitutes an example, a people for whom God will act in a wondrous way. God will let himself be known by this people, because this people will be a Word of God.

When the sea opens, the promise that God made to Noah is being fulfilled, the promise that he would never again allow the waters to destroy humanity. GOD OPENS WAYS THROUGH THE WATERS.

And they pass through. Pharaoh's army has not found the people because God has sent down a thick fog so that they do not see the people who will have time to pass. When all the people have already passed through, the Egyptian army wants to go through, but when they are all in the middle of the sea, the waters close again and destroy the whole army: horse and rider.

⁵ CCC 1221: But above all, the crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announces the liberation wrought by Baptism: You freed the children of Abraham from the slavery of Pharaoh, bringing them dry-shod through the waters of the Red Sea, to be an image of the people set free in Baptism (Roman Missal, Easter Vigil 42: Blessing of Water).

The people watch all this in astonishment from the bank and sing a song to God: God has covered himself in glory, because he has destroyed rider, horse and chariot. God has saved his people and has drowned his enemies (see Ex 15:1-21).

Now the people are free from the slavery of Egypt once and for all. But they find themselves in the desert. All their enemies have been buried. The song of Moses is important because it says: we have done nothing. It was God who opened the sea; it was not us who fought against the Pharaoh but God. They are only witnesses of this wonder done by God. And they say: "Yahweh is a powerful warrior."

The people find themselves in the desert and they have no idea where to go. It is God who leads them in the form of a shining cloud or a pillar of fire. When the cloud stops, they stop too and when it moves again, they start marching on.

But difficulties begin. They are hungry and in the desert there is no bread. Then they grumble again: This guy is crazy and he has dragged us all here to die. Then God sends them the Manna (see Ex 16).

But later on they get tired of manna and they want meat. They remember the onions and the garlic of Egypt. Moses must again call on God because again the people begin to murmur. God sends them quails till meat comes out of their ears (see Ex 16:12-13; Num 11:4-15, 31-35).

Then they are thirsty. There is no water there. They deny God and Moses another time and they go to tell him: You must give us water now, or we will kill you. Moses gets angry with them and says: Be patient; haven't you seen all that God has done for us up until today? They say to him: That it's nothing. It is all just by chance. We do not know what God you are speaking about. Nobody has seen him. This God does not exist (see Ex 17:1-7; Num 20:1-13).

Just think. They are stealing God's glory. Moses has to go to God who says to him: Strike this rock with your staff and water will come out. It is said that Moses doubted and struck twice. At the second blow, there was a gush of water. Because he doubted, Moses will not enter the Promised Land.

So you see that the people is constantly tempted in the desert and they continually deny God and Moses.

So they arrive at Mount Sinai that Moses climbs to receive the Law from the hand of God. Meanwhile the people deny God again and they build an idol, a great golden calf. They are tired of this God who cannot be represented in any way and they build their own idol, ascribing to him all the marvels that God has done with them (see Ex 19; 32).⁶

⁶ CCC 210: After Israel's sin, when the people had turned away from God to worship the golden calf, God hears Moses' prayer of intercession and agrees to walk in the midst of an unfaithful people, thus demonstrating his love (see Ex 32; 33:12-17). When Moses asks to see his glory, God responds "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'the LORD' [YHWH]" (Ex 33:18-19). Then the LORD passes before

At Mount Sinai God makes a covenant with them and they are constituted as his people. They receive the Law⁷.

They then arrive at the mountains and send out some men to explore. When they come back, they bring with them bunches of enormous grapes and milk and honey in abundance. They say that the land of Canaan is very fertile but that it is inhabited by seven nations of gigantic, strong men. The people start grumbling again and say: How shall we enter into this promised land with such powerful people there? They will kill all of us (Num 13:14).

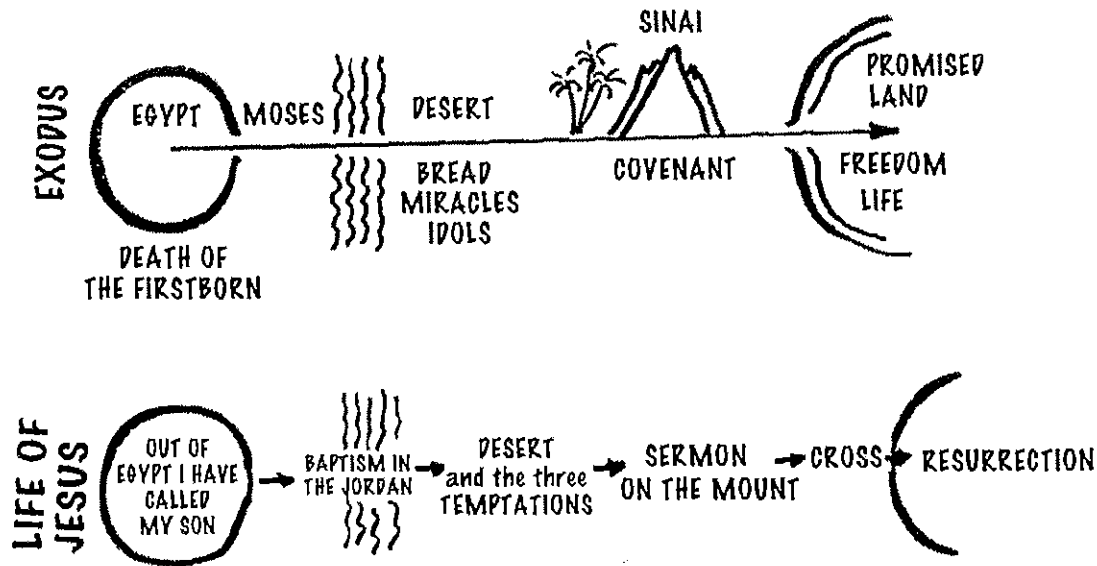
By now God is tired and makes them go back into the desert for forty years. Only the children of those who left Egypt will enter the Promised Land under the command of Joshua. The way God had planned was short: they would have received the land right away, but God punishes them for their lack of faith by making them wander about in the desert.

At the end of forty years, they enter into the Promised Land. God overcomes seven nations and gives them the promised land as their possession.

This is a Word of God for us: the Exodus. This word is so strong that the Israel of the flesh bases their entire liturgy on the Passover feast, where they celebrate and make present the passage from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the promised land. And they celebrate it with a bread, which represents slavery and misery and a cup of wine, which signifies freedom, the land and the covenant God has made with his people. On this night, they recount all the marvels God has performed for his people.

Moses and proclaims, "YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"; Moses then confesses that the LORD is a forgiving God (Ex 34:5-6; cf. 34:9).

⁷ CCC 62: After the patriarchs, God formed Israel as his people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. He established with them the covenant of Mount Sinai and, through Moses, gave them his law so that they would recognize him and serve him as the one living and true God, the provident Father and just judge and so that they would look for the promised Savior (see DV 3.)



This history is your history. This is a primordial event that is a Word of God forever, for all ages and nations. This is fulfilled literally. It has already been completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ and it has to be fulfilled in you. If you are not inside this Word, you are lost, because outside of it there is only death.

I would like to know where you are in this Word of God. Are you in Egypt, still oppressed by the Pharaoh who forces you to do his will? Have you met Moses who said to you: Come on, let's get out? Have you seen the slaveries being broken? Have you walked in a caravan with a people? Have you seen that the enemy was coming after you to destroy you? Have you seen the waters opening up? When did this happen in your life? Like the people of Israel in the desert, have you too denied God in the temptations? What temptations have you had?

This is your history. I would like to know whether you are inside of it, if you are here in some part of this Word, or if you are not inside this Word at all and you worry only about your television, your Saturdays, your work, your Sunday football, etc.

I would like to ask some of you: Where are you?

(ASK THE PEOPLE THE QUESTIONS)

Whereabouts in this history of the Exodus do you find yourself?

If you are in Egypt:

- What is your slavery?
- What is your Pharaoh?
- Have you met Moses?
- Who is your Moses?

If you are in the desert:

- When did you leave Egypt?
- Who brought you out of slavery?
- Do you feel you are no longer a slave?
- When did you pass through the Red Sea?
- With which caravan are you travelling through the desert?

(Whatever answers are given, it is a matter of helping the people to enter into the Word by asking them at which points in their lives did all the things happen that have happened up to now. At the end, it is easy for everyone to see clearly that they are in Egypt, slaves of sin because of their fear of death.)

(Kiko asks someone):

- Where would you say you are on this way? Where are you?
- I haven't the faintest idea.
- You can't find yourself in this way at all?
- It's the first time I've come and I find this all very difficult.
- This is your history. Where are you?
- I should have to think a lot about it. I don't know what to say.
- I tell you that this is your history, even if you do not see yourself in it. You can be in slavery, because this slavery of Israel is the type of all slaveries; or otherwise...
- Let's say that I'm crossing the Red Sea.
- Why do you think you are crossing it? I am saying that this is a Word of God, that what I am saying is the truth. If you are crossing the Red Sea, it means once you were in Egypt, in the spiritual Egypt, I mean. It means that in a certain period of your life you were oppressed by sex, or by your father, or because you were not able to study, or because you were in a terrible crisis, or because you were unable to control your life and others managed it; and you were in a terrible crisis. If this is true, then it means that you have been taken out of this crisis, from this situation of slavery, by a liberator. Who has been for you the liberator from all that you have experienced?
- I haven't a clue.
- Fine. Sit down. Thank you.

He asks someone else:

- Where would you place yourself?
- I think I am getting out of the slavery of Egypt.
- Could you explain this to us better?
- Perhaps it is because recently I have gone through a very

bad period that I am coming out of little by little, a time in which everything was going wrong and I did not find meaning in anything.

- So you acknowledge that this Word is fulfilled in your life; that is, that you have been in Egypt, in a situation of slavery. Isn't that so?

- That's right.

- Who was your Moses in this situation of slavery, who was the one who took you out, can you tell us? Have you met Moses or not yet?

- I haven't thought about it, but I think so. I think that it has been a series of events or a series of people or a concrete person who has helped me.

- Fine. Thank you very much. Just see how totally removed we are from a meeting with the Word of God. It seems like Chinese to us.

He asks someone else:

- Where would you put yourself on this journey?

- I think that concretely I'm at the gates of Egypt.

- Who is Moses in your life, concretely?

- Well, it's certain events or circumstances, which are rather private, which are painful for me to expose.

- Couldn't you just tell us something briefly?

- I would identify Moses as the brother who is sitting next to me [a catechist]. I had completely abandoned the things of the Church and religion. Not long ago I had a problem, a crisis and in these moments I did not remember St. Barbara like when there is a thunderstorm, because to remember God or the saints for help in this situation already had very little meaning for me. One day, when I was passing by here in a situation of total crisis, I went into the church and saw this bearded guy talking, this man here sitting next to me. He was promising a lot of things that seemed extraordinary to me and he was announcing a catechesis. And so I have come here everyday.

- And have you begun to come out of Egypt? Has something in your situation of crisis been clarified?

- Well, yes, a bit, I hope that what you have promised, which is a lot, will really be fulfilled. That is why I am here.

- Very good. You have been able to place yourself inside the Word. By what this brother has said you can see a little of what the Word of God is, which is true because it is fulfilled, it is realized in your life and because it prophesies your reality.

He asks a woman:

- Where would you put yourself?

- I don't know. I think that to fall sometimes does not mean that you are in slavery, since the Israelites, while walking through the desert, fell other times. It seems to me that the situation of slavery is something else. It means that

you lack everything, that you don't have any superior aspirations or anything like that.

- Yes, but it is the Church who gives the explanation of the Word. I am asking you: Where are you?

- I am in the desert because, as I have said, this sensation of slavery, I do not have and have never had.

- But if you have never been in Egypt then you have never had a Pharaoh and you have not crossed the Red Sea, nor walked in a caravan. Did you ever experience Pharaoh who wants to put you in slavery?

- No, in slavery, never. Because if I say that I have never been in Egypt then I cannot ask to be taken out of slavery.

- Well then, how did you arrive in the desert?

- Well, I am like the children of the Israelites who were born in the desert.

- You cannot give an interpretation of the Word as you like because there is already an interpretation which is the one given by the Church. Anyway, thank you.

He asks someone else:

- Where are you?

- At first I thought like this sister that I was in the desert, but after listening to what she has said, I think I am inside the circle of slavery in Egypt.

- Do you find yourself completely inside there, or has Moses already appeared? Or are you there putting up with everything that is done to you?

- Let's just say that something has appeared which could be Moses, but I do not know if it will be.

- And what is this something?

- Your help.

- Good. Sit down.

As you have been able to see a bit from the answers you gave, this Word is fulfilled in you. It is not past history that we have to know as educated and cultured people. It is the Word of God that enlightens your concrete reality of today.

Egypt is the type of all slavery. This way that the people journeyed along until they arrived in the Promised Land is a Word of God because it makes your history and my history explicit. For Israel this Word is very strong. So much so that on every fourteenth of Nissan they meet, family by family, to celebrate Passover.

On this night, they make a memorial, not only as a remembrance of the past, but they make present the passage from slavery to freedom. On this night the Exodus comes back to bring to freedom every one who feels himself a slave. That is why they say: If there is someone here tonight who feels that he is a slave, let him come tonight with us to pass, to get out, to make Passover. For the arm of Yahweh, which brought us out of Egypt with strength and gave us freedom, it didn't wither, but is

still outstretched to free with power all those who are in a situation of slavery. It is a great feast that revolves around the bread and the cup of wine. On this night they give thanks to God with all their might for the marvels that he has performed with them. And they go on telling the entire Exodus step by step.

Do you know what all these events are saying? They are just one Word. This Word tells us that God is the one who breaks all the deaths which grip us: he breaks the circle of the slavery of Egypt; he breaks the sea which threatened us with death; he breaks the death of the lack of bread, the one of the lack of meat, the one of the lack of water, the one of the enemies occupying the land. GOD OPENS WAYS THROUGH DEATH TOWARDS THE PROMISED LAND.

This Word makes itself present tonight and do you know what it tells us? IF THERE IS SOMEONE HERE WHO IS ENSLAVED BY SOMETHING, BY SEX, BY THE DEFECTS OF HIS WIFE, BECAUSE ONE OF HIS SONS IS ILL AND ANOTHER DOES NOT STUDY, BECAUSE HIS DAUGHTER HAS BECOME A HIPPIE, BECAUSE HE CANNOT STAND HIS WORK, BECAUSE HE DOES NOT EARN ENOUGH, BECAUSE HE HAS DISCOVERED THAT HE IS NEUROTIC, BECAUSE HE IS UP TO HIS NECK IN DEBTS, OR FOR ANY REASON WHATSOEVER, IF YOU HAVE AN EVENT OF DEATH WHICH TODAY ENCIRCLES AND CLOSES YOU IN, THIS WORD COMES TO YOUR HELP TODAY, COMES TO BRING YOU OUT OF THIS SLAVERY AND TO INVITE YOU TO PASS TO FREEDOM.

THIS WORD SAYS ONE THING ONLY: THAT GOD IS LOVE, THAT GOD IS THE ONE WHO OPENS WAYS THROUGH DEATH.

THIS WORD INVITES YOU TO TRUST IN GOD. THIS WORD SAYS TO YOU THAT GOD HAS BROKEN THIS DEATH and THAT ONE and THE OTHER TOO. WHY, THEN, TODAY, DON'T YOU TRUST IN GOD? WHAT IS IT TODAY THAT STOPS YOU FROM BEING HAPPY? THE FACT THAT YOU THINK THAT THE WATER WILL NOT ARRIVE. BECAUSE YOU THINK THAT THIS DEATH THAT YOU ARE IN WILL DESTROY YOU FOREVER. YOU DO NOT TRUST NOR HOPE IN SOMEONE WHO CAN LOVE YOU, WHO WILL BE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE SEA AND THE PHARAOH.

THIS WORD ENCOURAGES ALL OF YOU TO TRUST IN GOD WHO IS LOVE AND WHO ACTS WITH POWER IN FAVOR OF MEN BY DESTROYING THE DEATH THAT ENSLAVES THEM.

But what happens to Israel? They gather together to celebrate the feast of Passover, all very lovely and everybody sings that God is love, that God has destroyed horse and rider, that God is great. But then tomorrow (the same thing that happens to you when you come out of Mass), when you get angry with your wife, you forget everything and you do not take this Word upon yourself.

God brought them out of Egypt, opened the sea, gave them manna... But, come on, now there is another event of death in your life and already you stop trusting in anything. A letter arrives for you, or someone does something wrong to you and again you are in crisis: again, absolute doubt in God.

Who is able to take this Word upon himself? WHO TRULY FULFILLS THIS WORD AND ABANDONS HIMSELF TO GOD IN EVERY EVENT OF DEATH WITHOUT REBELLING?

JESUS CHRIST FULFILLED THIS WORD.⁸ HE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS ACCEPTED THIS WORD. IN HIM THE "PASCHAL SEDER," THE PASSOVER, HAS BECOME FLESH. Christ, when the cross was put in front of him (the cross which is the symbol of death), did not doubt God. He did not say: This cross is the proof that God does not love me, this cross, which for you can be cancer or any event of death. IN FRONT OF THE CROSS JESUS CHRIST DID NOT REBEL. HE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS FULFILLED THIS WORD BECAUSE HE IS THE WORD OF GOD MADE FLESH.

And on the same night when Israel is celebrating these events, Jesus Christ is on the cross making them flesh and reality. According to the *Targum Neophiti* Isaac said to Abraham: Bind me, bind me tight, my father, lest I resist out of fear and the sacrifice is not valid and both of us are rejected! Well then, Jesus Christ was tied down so tightly that he was nailed to the cross! He tied himself to the will of the Father, he who said: My food is to do the will of my Father.

THIS WORD HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN HIM. BECAUSE ISRAEL, LIKE YOU AND ME, HAS ALWAYS BEEN UNFAITHFUL TO THIS WORD. BECAUSE OF THIS, SINCE NO ONE IS ABLE TO FULFILL IT, GOD GIVES US THIS WORD FULFILLED, FREELY, IN JESUS CHRIST.

This is why the Gospels present Jesus Christ as the true Israel: because in him the Word of God is fulfilled, because he is the Word of God made flesh (Jn 1:14).

If we take the Gospel of Matthew, we see that it begins with the genealogy of Jesus Christ to link him to the offspring of David. Moses was born in the midst of a slaughter of infants. Jesus' birth provokes a slaughter of infants. In him the whole of Exodus is fulfilled.

Jesus goes down to Egypt to fulfill the Scriptures that say: "Out of Egypt I have called my son" (Mt 2:15).

In the same way that Israel, after leaving Egypt, passes through the waters of the sea, Jesus Christ is also taken to the river Jordan to be baptized.

Later on, like the people of Israel, Jesus is tempted in the desert. Israel spent forty years in the wilderness; Jesus spent forty days. The three temptations Jesus has to undergo are

⁸ CCC 1094: It is on this harmony of the two Testaments that the Paschal catechesis of the Lord is built (see DV 14-16; Lk 24:13-49) and then, that of the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. This catechesis unveils what lay hidden under the letter of the Old Testament: the mystery of Christ. It is called "typological" because it reveals the newness of Christ on the basis of the "figures" (types) which announce him in the deeds, words and symbols of the first covenant. By this re-reading in the Spirit of Truth, starting from Christ, the figures are unveiled (see 2 Cor 3:14-16). Thus the flood and Noah's ark prefigured salvation by Baptism (see 1 Pt 3:21), as did the cloud and the crossing of the Red Sea. Water from the rock was the figure of the spiritual gifts of Christ and manna in the desert prefigured the Eucharist, "the true bread from heaven" (Jn 6:32).

the same ones the people of Israel suffered: the temptation of bread, the temptation of miracles and the temptation of idols (Mt 4:1-11).

Maybe you have never understood all this about the three temptations that Jesus had. Let's have a look at them now.

Someone will think: But what stupid temptations! I have other ones that are more serious. Well, look at this: what is the Holy Spirit trying to do by sending these temptations to Jesus? It means that Jesus, who became man like you and like me, was subject to the same temptations that every man is subject to, to the same temptations that the people of Israel had. We, like Israel, when faced with these temptations, have fallen and cursed God, worshipping the evil one. Jesus takes on these temptations and comes out victorious. Only him.

First temptation: security. The devil says to him: Why are you dying of hunger? Aren't you the Son of God? Well then, tell these stones to turn into bread. Jesus replies: Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word which comes from the mouth of God. What is the first temptation that you have in life? To secure bread before everything else. And you say to your son: Son, study and assure your future, which is what is important. The first thing is to eat and to have money. And for money we are able to get rid of anyone. We have no time for anything else.

Second temptation: that of asking for miracles, of not accepting one's reality. The devil says: Why don't you throw yourself from the pinnacle of the temple? How will anyone pay any attention to you if you are the son of a carpenter and have such a dull life? No one will notice you. Why don't you do something more spectacular? Go up to the temple when the courtyard is crowded, throw yourself from the pinnacle and the angels will catch you. Then everyone, open-mouthed, will say: The Messiah has come! Why accept such an obscure life of work and sweat amongst men? Everyone will laugh at you. We all have this temptation in our flesh: the temptation of success, of being a star, of being St. Francis of Assisi and Napoleon, or Sofia Loren and St. Teresa, all at the same time. Every man has this temptation: of triumphing, of not accepting our existential reality, the reality you have now: this wife, so ugly and long-faced, with whom you find yourself; this drunken, rude husband; this daughter who comes home late at night; this son who has turned out mediocre. The existential reality that God has given you: that you are not intelligent enough to study and have to work; that you have some physical defect. Israel had these temptations. She had the temptation to secure bread for herself; she wanted manna and not only bread but meat. They remembered the garlic and onions because they weren't very sure of bread in the desert. And they had this temptation too. They didn't accept having to walk by roads they didn't know; they didn't want to walk through the desert because in the desert no one can survive; they wanted to walk by ways they could understand. They don't accept the reality that God gives them and they ask for miracles: water now, right this moment.

It is the same temptation that we have: to want to dominate

everything, to know everything, to want water right now, not tomorrow. And we ask God for miracles. How is it that God is good and made me so ugly? How is it that God does things without consulting me? How can I have a daughter with leukemia? But what's all this about? I'm not going to Mass any more! Never again! No one has explained to you the why of your reality. Everything has to be explained to you literally. How is it that there is someone above you? No, no way. The one who is above everything is me! This is present in the subconscious of every man.

Third temptation: the one of the idols. But what do you want? Do you want success, prestige, money, to be a star, to dominate? Come on, leave all these stupidities! I will give all this to you, if you bow down and adore me. What is it that we want fundamentally? You want to triumph, don't you? Well, look, if God does not solve things, psychology will, science will, money will, idols will; anything will. It's what happens in Latin America: the people go to Mass, but if God or St. Rita or St. Barbara or the Blessed Virgin Mary doesn't cure their daughter, do you know where they go? Well, here in a nearby town there's a healer who does fantastic witchcraft; they say he does marvelous things. What is important is to cure their daughter; everything else is fairy tales.

The same thing happens to Israel. Moses goes up the mountain for forty days and do you know what they make as soon as the leader goes away? A golden calf. Because the bull is the symbol of fecundity, because all the peoples have their images and carry them in procession and everyone sings and it's wonderful. But what a pain: we don't have images. I would like to touch an image. And yet this God does not want us to make images. What a strange thing! And so they build an idol and say: You are our God, you brought us out of Egypt. The other God no one has seen.

This is the third temptation. The only thing you want is money, however you get it, even by gambling. If religion does not satisfy you, you go to the secularized world, because science gives you the same security that religion once gave. Medicine, psychiatry and sociology can do everything.

With this maybe you can begin to understand these temptations in the Gospel that seem like foolishness. On the contrary, they are a Word of God that says that no man can fulfill it. You and I fall in front of the temptation of vanity, of wanting to be, of triumphing, of money, of wanting everyone to applaud you, of cutting a fine figure. We all always fall and we want to dominate others, to secure life first of all, etc. Israel also falls throughout her history. THIS IS WHY GOD HANDS OVER TO US, IN JESUS CHRIST, THIS WORD FULFILLED. For this, in Christ, today I do not fall.

If Christ lives in me, he gives me the free possibility of realizing myself according to God, of not rebelling against God. And if Christ lives in me, I will be able to go where God wants me to go. St. John of the Cross said: To go to a place you do not know, you must go through a place that you do not know. A person who has no faith will never be able to do this. We do not

abandon ourselves to God. Because faith is to live in abandonment to God.

God is the one who speaks to you through the events of your life. We begin to enter into a new type of spirituality: the spirituality of the Bible. We will dialogue with God through the concrete circumstances of our history, where everything that happens to you happens to you for a purpose. God is talking to you and he wants to tell you something through everything that happens to you. When you have an illness, when you are without money, when they insult you, etc.; God is speaking with you. So that a Christian who has faith lives in constant dialogue with God: not in a dialogue that he imagines or invents, but in the dialogue God has with him through circumstances and events. This is how God dialogues with Israel: in her history. Because God is present in history, acting.

As you have seen, the Word of God is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, because he is the only one who abandons himself completely to the Father. He lets himself be guided by the Father. He sees the will of the Father in the cross and he will say to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan, won't you let me drink the chalice which my Father has prepared for me?" (see Mt 16:23.)

Which one of us will see in the cross, in the events of death in our life, the will of God who allows them according to his plan because he loves us? ONLY JESUS CHRIST HAS FULFILLED THIS WORD BECAUSE JESUS IS THE WORD FULFILLED.

Abraham says: I do not understand why God is asking me to sacrifice my only son, but God will provide.

CHRIST CLIMBS THE CROSS SAYING: GOD WILL PROVIDE, GOD WILL TAKE ME OUT OF HERE. But of course! Is it perhaps that God does not love me? Who has said so? Men? Even if I were in the depths of the earth, even if my wife were to die, even if my children were to leave home and spit on me, even if I am a sinner, God is great and he is love; he will take me out of here and he will raise me up because he loves the sinner.

This is what all Scripture says, so that all of Scripture may be a Word of Salvation for the most miserable and sinful, the most lost man. God is the one who loves the sinner and he will not allow the man who trusts in him even a little to die. And, even if he does not trust in him, God loves him totally. We men, perhaps, do not believe in a God like that, because we do not see him made visible anywhere, because the majority of people think that God is how they imagine him: with a great big stick ready to punish you every time you make a mistake.

This is what is believed by those who think about God in some way, because the majority do not think about God at all; God does not exist: let him mind his own business and I'll mind mine!

FOURTEENTH DAYQUESTIONNAIRE ON THE WORD OF GOD

Catechism of the Catholic Church: God's revelation (51-58); the Apostolic Tradition (75-79); the relation between Tradition and Sacred Scripture (80-83); Word of God and Sacred Scripture (81, 104, 108, 124, 135); the canon of Scripture (120-130); Christ, the unique Word of Sacred Scripture (101-103, 581, 687); inspiration and truth of Scripture (105-108); the Holy Spirit, interpreter of Scripture (109-119, 1100-1102); the Magisterium of the Church, authentic interpreter of Scripture (85, 100, 103, 119, 182, 2030); the Word of God, light for our path (1785, 1802, 1848)

(Kiko)

The first thing to do is to practice the songs for the following day's celebration. Then read the questionnaire and distribute it to the people. Then divide the people into small groups as you did for the questionnaire on penance, with a secretary in each group to take note of the answers.

The questionnaire says:

INTRODUCTION

The manifestation of God, that is, his plan for you, is marked in the Bible in a language that needs to be understood. St. Augustine says: "All those who love God and, through his mercy, are meek, look for the will of God in these Books" (see *Christian Doctrine*: 2, 5, 6; 3, 37, 56). St. Paul also says to Timothy: "All Scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16). And referring to the events of the Old Testament he says: "These things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). And Jesus says to us: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (Jn 5:39).

Questions:

1. What has the Bible meant for you and what does it mean for you now?
2. How do you think it was formed and how do you think it has come down to us?
3. What do you think the difference between Word of God and Scripture is?
4. What concrete meaning do these words from Genesis have for you today: "And God said to Abraham, 'Leave your

land and your kindred and your father's house and come to the land I will show you'?"

The purpose of these questions is to prepare the people to listen to a catechesis that you have to give later on the Word of God and on Scripture.

When the groups have finished their work and you are all together again, the secretaries answer the four questions.

In my experience, most people say that the Bible has meant very little to them. The majority of them have read a little of the New Testament but almost nothing of the Old Testament.

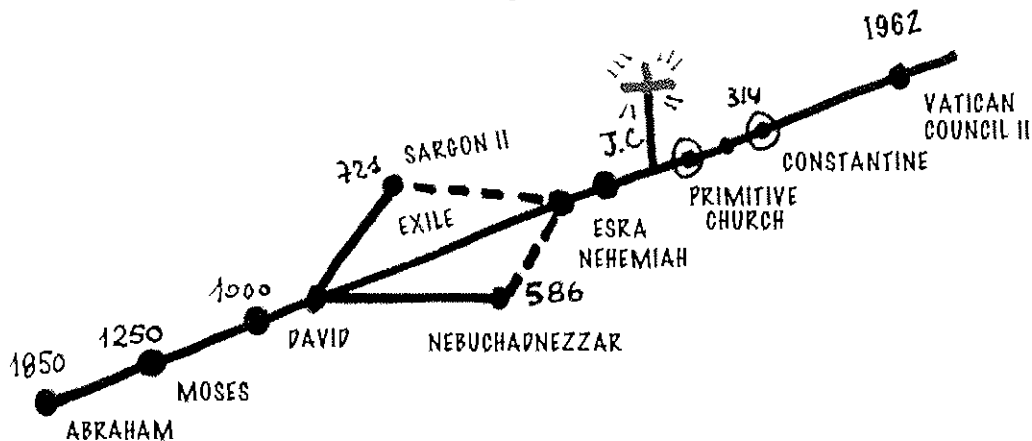
Nor do they have much idea about how it was formed and how it has come down to us, even if there is always someone who has taken a biblical course and knows a bit more.

Many people do not see much difference between the Word of God and Scripture, even if they say there is a difference. The fourth question is to get them to see that Scripture is something for us. It is hoped that this short passage from Scripture will help the people to see what their situation is and that they will say what the passage means for them.

Then you must give a catechesis. You do not have to talk a lot or give some kind of Bible study lecture, for example, about how many traditions there are or other cultural things; people end up relying on these things and say: I'm beginning to know the Bible. The important thing is not this, but rather to give them a few very small ideas which will enlighten them a bit about this book, which is going to be the basis of work during the catechumenate. It will be the book of daily prayer for those brothers and sisters who are going to begin to walk.

It is very important to explain a little about how the Bible was formed but without going into too many details. Cultural things are then forgotten because they are secondary.

First of all, make a panoramic view of the history of salvation with this drawing:



In history, we place Abraham around 1850 BC; around 1250 BC there is the event of the Exodus with Moses; David comes in 1000 BC, then Solomon and immediately afterwards Israel is divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the North and Judah in the South.

In 721 BC the northern kingdom is conquered by Sargon II and is taken into exile in Assyria and in 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem, capital of the southern kingdom and puts them into exile, too. In 538 BC Cyrus allows them to return again to Palestine. In the 5th century BC Nehemiah and Ezra make the reconstruction of Judaism and begin the definitive compilation of these books.

In the year zero, Jesus Christ appears and founds the Church, the Christian community.

It is very important to have this drawing in front of you during the catechesis in order to understand how the Bible was formed and what the difference is between the Word of God and Scripture, which are the two things to see in this catechesis.

First of all, there is something that needs to be explained. We have a western type of mentality and this book was written and compiled by eastern people. Perhaps it is because of this that we believe that revelation consists of the fact that God got hold of a few guys, appeared to them during the night and said to them: Start writing. We think that God dictated the Bible because he wants to speak and tell things to men. If this were so, the Bible would contain a series of truths that God dictated and some laws that he gave us so that we can live in the right way. But what happens is that you open this book and you find very strange things: little stories, wars, killing, murders, sins, etc. and you don't understand anything. That's why the first thing to clarify is this: it is true that God is the author of Scripture, in the sense that it was inspired by him (we will see how),¹ but God has not written anything directly, just as Jesus Christ didn't leave anything written.

Then how was the Bible formed? What is this collection of books?

The Bible contains various sections: the first part is called the Torah or Law, which consists of five books (the Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Then there are the prophets. The Hebrews divide the prophets into major and minor ones. For Israel the major prophets are all the prophets and the minor prophets are what we call the historical books, those that come after Exodus (Judges, Chronicles, etc.). That's why, reading these historical books, you'll see that they are written with commentaries which are a prophetic interpretation of the events; parallel to the facts, there appears a theological interpretation of these facts; the

¹ CCC 105: *God is the author of Sacred Scripture*. "The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

"For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself" (DV 11).

books are not purely historical. Like this, we understand that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the whole law and all the prophets (see Mt 5:17).

Instead, we call Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel major prophets and all the others (Hosea, Amos, Haggai, etc.) the minor prophets.

In addition to these, there are writings that include all the other books: the Psalms, the Wisdom Books, Proverbs, etc. They are books which Israel herself wrote and preserved because she recognized that they were inspired, because she saw that God was acting in those books.

Finally there is the New Testament, which includes the Gospels (4), the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles and the Apocalypse.

This is not very important. I say it just for you. If you want to say it, do so; otherwise, don't.

As we said earlier, GOD DID NOT WRITE ANYTHING DIRECTLY. FUNDAMENTALLY, WHAT GOD DID WAS ACT. HE LET HIMSELF BE KNOWN BY ACTING. This book does not contain truths of an intellectual sort, but it tells of the wonders that God has done in the history of humanity, saving men.

So we understand that for Israel there is no difference between Word and event. This is important. When we read: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1), we do not understand it very well because for our western mentality the word is exclusively related to the intelligence; the word for us is an "idea;" we understand the word as something which teaches us something in an intellectual way: for us it is like a thought, a concept.

It is not like this for Israel. The word is close to the act. For example, God said: "Let there be light," and there was light. For Israel you cannot separate the Word of God from the performance of this Word: it is the same thing. The Word is an action in which God manifests himself. In Christianity the same thing happens: we start with an historical fact, from an event which God works. Through this fact men get to know God because in it God manifests himself and lets himself be known.

For Israel the Word is not to teach things, to indoctrinate, but rather, it is another who gets in contact with you. That is why we say that the Word is not far from the meaning that the word has in its deepest human sense.

For example: you are walking down the street in the middle of a big crowd and a person you have not seen for a long time and whom you really want to see calls you and says: "Peter!" Suddenly someone has recognized you in the middle of all that crowd, he has called you by name, he has put himself into communication with you; someone has entered into your existence. When this person says "Peter" to you, he doesn't say to you: "You're clever, you're ugly, you're blonde, do this or do that, the world is like this, God has done things like this." He simply puts himself into communication with you; he knew you and he called you from among all the others.

This is very important because this is the meaning that the

Word has for Israel. GOD CALLED HER OUT OF ALL THE OTHER PEOPLES AND SAID: "ISRAEL." AND ISRAEL LIFTED UP HER EYES AND MET GOD. GOD HAS KNOWN ISRAEL AND HAS MANIFESTED HIMSELF TO HER.

So St. Paul says: "You have come to know God, or rather to be known by God"(see Gal 4:9). You can know God only in the measure in which he manifests himself to you.

God calls Israel and Israel discovers that God is he who gets in contact with the people, who cares for them, who loves them, who calls them and acts with them.

This is very difficult for us to understand because we have a western mentality that is greatly influenced by a certain rationalism and we come from a theology that is sometimes quite rationalistic. Reason, without doubt, has its role in the development of theology and systematic theology certainly has its importance.² But it is to be hoped that the Church will lean less and less on that type of theology, which seems to be attempting to box Christianity up in abstract schemes, when Christianity is fundamentally an event. It would be dreadful to box Christianity up in a certain type of theology that is useful only for our own intellectual satisfaction, to feed and increase our vanity and to dominate others with our knowledge. There was someone who had an intuition about this danger: St. Francis of Assisi, for example, tried to avoid this kind of theology.

This, brothers and sisters, feeds you very little. Because basically the Church is an historical fact that is there. What use is it to know a lot of theology if you do not love your brother? If you have not gone through the experience of the Cross, you are not an adult Christian, no matter how much you know and no matter how many things you tell me. The event is to have freely received the gift of eternal life, the Holy Spirit.

² CCC 158: "Faith seeks understanding": it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love. The grace of faith opens "the eyes of your hearts" (Eph 1:18) to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation: that is, of the totality of God's plan and the mysteries of faith, of their connection with each other and with Christ, the center of the revealed mystery. "The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood." In the words of St. Augustine, "I believe, in order to understand; and I understand the better to believe."

CCC 94: Thanks to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the understanding of both the realities and the words of the heritage of faith is able to grow in the life of the Church:

- "through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts"; it is in particular "theological research [which] deepens knowledge of revealed truth."

- "from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which [believers] experience", the sacred Scriptures "grow with the one who reads them."

The Word has a very direct relationship with love. You know that one of the things that has most worried scholars is the birth of language because if you do not hear the words of someone else, you are not able to speak. Take the case of Helen Keller who was deaf, mute and blind from birth. She was like an animal until Anne Sullivan got in contact with her through a language based on touch. Then the child began to develop as a person.

Language, I was saying, is one of the big question marks of mankind. During the last war, they did an experiment to learn about the origins of language. In a home for abandoned children they took some of them, fed them perfectly but did not allow them to listen to even one human word. Do you know what happened to them? They had to stop the experiment to stop them from dying. Physiologically they were looked after perfectly. In this way the direct relationship between the mother's word and the child's life was seen. The mother's word, with its language of love as a means of communication with the child, is the mother herself entering into the life of the child, she gives life to the child.

The eastern concept of the word is very close to this. For us today, the word has lost much value, we have corrupted it. We are full of empty words. We live in a world full of meaningless words.

The last time I was in Italy, I was invited to talk to a group of Verona Fathers, missionaries who had come from all over the world and who were on vacation before returning to their missions. One of them, who came from a very primitive region of Africa where they were still sacrificing cows, said that he had been enormously impressed by the sense of the word that these people had. They have minds that are very fresh and they do not know lies. And if he told them that God exists, they believed it just like that and then no one could get it out of their heads because among the inhabitants of that region the word has not been discredited or corrupted! Their contracts are always verbal because nobody says anything but the truth.

These writings have come to us from an eastern people who have transmitted them to us. And we must not forget that they arose from within the history that God made with a people who had a concept of the Word that is different from ours, a very Hellenistic and rationalistic one.

The other day, in the meeting at the Diaconal Center, Fr. Farnés said: If I tell you the story of Little Red Riding Hood, you all can understand me, can't you? Even the children would understand me. But if I were to tell you the story of Little Red Riding Hood in Chinese, who would understand? If you wanted to understand me then you would need to learn Chinese. This is what happens with the Old Testament. You do not understand it if you do not understand the language and the vision of the people of Israel. It is easier to understand the Old Testament than the New Testament; the only thing is that it is written in a key that you need to know. This is what is difficult for us: to enter into the mentality in which the books of the Bible are written.

Let us see how these books were formed, how they reached us. To see this I am going to begin from the end: from 1972, from us.

What is the first event here among us? The first event of these communities is that Jesus Christ is alive and risen and that he continues to call people and to transform them. He has called me and he has called you, he is transforming our lives. Our call has a relationship with you, because we were called for you. Having been called, we have announced the Word to you. The announcement of this Word, which calls people together and creates communion among them, is the event that is taking place among us. It is a prophetic Word that is fulfilled in you because it has seized you, it has made you walk. In fact, you are walking because you believed in this Word that we have announced to you. This Word, then, is a fact, an event.

This Word, then, you have expressed and celebrated in events: in agapes, in liturgical celebrations, singing together, in wanting to get to know one another, to love one another, in the desire to thank God together, to pray together, to forgive one another. That is, the first thing is this event that we are living: Jesus Christ alive and risen and we express it in liturgies, songs, community gatherings.

The first things that you have written are for sure the words of some of the songs, to be able to learn them. Also, maybe you have taken notes about the more fundamental things that you have heard. And then, if you have to give a catechesis, you put together the different things that some of you have written down to make a summary or scheme.

This is very important: see how the writings are preceded by a lived experience. The first thing you have done was not to write things down. Besides, what meaning do your notes have without the life that preceded them? None. You give them to someone who did not listen to the announcement and they say nothing to him. Instead, you reread them and what you experienced comes alive again in you. And again, what meaning do the schemas of the catecheses you give have without your catechists? None. Everything written IS PRECEDED BY YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCE OF GOD AND BY THE LITURGICAL EXPRESSION OF IT. Those writings have meaning only because God has acted in you, because they are tied to events of which you are a witness.

The same thing happens if we speak of the primitive Church. The Church began by preaching, celebrating and living. Jesus Christ did not leave anything written down. JESUS CHRIST IS A HISTORICAL EVENT. JESUS CHRIST IS THE FIRSTBORN OF A NEW CREATION, HE IS AN EVENT: MANKIND HAS TRANSCENDED DEATH; THIS RISEN MAN IS A WORD OF GOD FOR ALL MEN; HE HAS BEEN CONSTITUTED SPIRIT WHO GIVES LIFE; THIS NEW MAN IS THE KOINONIA, TOTAL COMMUNION WITH ALL MANKIND TO THE POINT OF EMBRACING EVERY MAN WITH LOVE BECAUSE THIS NEW MAN IS IN COMMUNION WITH ALL HIS ENEMIES and IF THERE IS A MAN WHO IS A MURDERER, A GRUMBLER, PROUD, HE IS LOVED BY THE NEW MAN; THIS NEW EXISTENCE OF MAN, THIS MAN OF THE SPIRIT IS JESUS CHRIST. THE APOSTLES ARE WITNESSES OF THIS. THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED THAT JESUS CHRIST LIVES IN THEM AND HE ENABLES THEM TO LOVE IN THE DIMENSION OF THE

CROSS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED. THE CHURCH TRANSMITS THIS LIFE THAT SHE HAS EXPERIENCED.

This event, this risen Jesus Christ whom they have seen with their own eyes as an indescribable wonder that surpasses their reason, has become life in them. They have been given the power to live, the power to be in communion with the new man, to be like him, to live in him, to be reborn from him. The risen Jesus Christ is an historic event for them. They were dead, they were in hell, and nature was hostile to them. Now their life is transformed. They feel love as a gift that is freely given to them. They feel in communion with nature and with things. This event in the apostles' lives, of feeling God in them, of feeling in communion with mankind, of feeling that death has been overcome within them and that the sting of death, sin, has been destroyed in them, has nothing to do with their reason. Pentecost is an historical fact for them, a reality and a lived experience, a fact that empowers them.

The Church is not born from writings (it is not a religion of the book),³ but from THE EVENT THAT JESUS GIVES THEM THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SENDS THEM OUT SO THAT, WHEN THEY GO TO PREACH, THE RISEN JESUS CHRIST GOES WITH THEM; SO THAT THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST AND ACCEPT THE WORD OF SALVATION ARE ALSO FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT and IN THEM THE RISEN JESUS CHRIST LIVES. KOINONIA IS BORN AMONG THEM.

The apostles call the good news the "Word of salvation" (see Acts 13:26),⁴ the Good News. THE WORD IS IDENTIFIED WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GOOD NEWS, WITH THE KERYGMA OF JESUS CHRIST. THIS IS THE WORD, THIS IS JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF. THIS WORD HAS THE POWER TO GENERATE A NEW CREATURE IN THE ONE WHO WELCOMES AND KEEPS IT. IT HAS THE POWER TO FULFILL AND REALIZE WHAT IT ANNOUNCES IN THE ONE WHO BELIEVES IN IT.

It is the same Word that the angel spoke to Mary. Mary accepted this Word and the Word had the power to accomplish what it had promised. THIS WORD IS WORD OF GOD BECAUSE IT HAS COME FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD and IT ALWAYS FULFILLS ITS MISSION. This Word, which you say with your lips and has a sound, has immense force. This Word gives life to those who listen to it. So we can understand that someone can give his life to bring this Word to

³ CCC 108: Still, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book." Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, "not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living" (St. Bernard of Clairvaux). If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, "open (our) minds to understand the Scriptures" (see Lk 24:45).

⁴ CCC 124: "The Word of God, which is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, is set forth and displays its power in a most wonderful way in the writings of the New Testament" (DV 17) which hand on the ultimate truth of God's Revelation. Their central object is Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son: his acts, teachings, Passion and glorification and his Church's beginnings under the Spirit's guidance (see DV 20).

the world. Because this Word is Jesus Christ himself. This Word is foolishness for the world. The world believes in another kind of Word. This Word, nevertheless, always fulfills its mission, even with the world. As Isaiah says: This Word is like the rain that falls and always accomplishes its mission and fecundates (see Is 55:10-11). And even when this Word is rejected, it has already accomplished its mission: it has judged and condemned the person who rejects it. I have not come to judge the world, Jesus Christ says, but on the last day this Word will condemn you (see Jn 12:47-48). The primitive Church knew this very well: the only condemnation that exists in the world and the only salvation is this Word. Whoever welcomes it receives life; whoever rejects it is condemned by this very Word because they reject the life that comes from this Word. This Word does not demand anything, it is a Good News which comes to save the world; whoever does not accept it remains in hell.

THIS WORD IS THE EVENT: OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN; WE DO NOT DIE; OUR LIFE IS REALLY MOVING TOWARDS THE FEAST.

Whoever has met Jesus Christ has entered the feast. For whoever has not met him, his life is hell, even if he comes to the community and knows the catecheses by heart. THIS WORD IS AN EVENT. THIS IS THE WORD WHICH WE HAVE ANNOUNCED TO YOU AND WHICH WE WILL ALWAYS ANNOUNCE TO YOU. IT IS THE GOOD NEWS OF THE LOVE OF GOD WHO FORGIVES US. BECAUSE GOD IS LOVE FOR THE ENEMY. If we are enemies of God, if we have done terrible things, God loves us and forgives us. Nothing is demanded of you; you just have to receive this Word gratis and believe in it. This Word tells you to abandon yourself to God, to look at God, to trust and lean on him.

To preach conversion is to say: BROTHERS AND SISTERS, BE HAPPY, BECAUSE NOW YOU CAN BE CONVERTED; NOW YOU CAN BE FREED GRATIS BY THE POWER OF CHRIST. If there is someone who has not been freed, it is because he has not believed in this Word. The fruit of having welcomed this Word is the fulfillment of what it announces: grace from God, the forgiveness and the love of God who gives you his Spirit. Keep this Word and trust in it. This Word announces a promise to you: you will be completely freed from the slavery of Egypt. Set out on a way with a community, welcome the Messiah who comes to free you, trust in him and he will lead you to the waters. Do not be afraid of the waters. Your enemies will come after you, they will get close to you, but do not worry: I shall destroy them. Trust in me and don't be afraid; you won't remain confused.

What happens is that many people do not trust in this Word and they want to destroy their enemies by themselves. So they leave the way, they abandon Moses and the vanguard of the Pharaoh, which is close behind them, falls on them and kills them.

He who has really believed in this Word trusts and awaits his liberation. And this liberation comes about. Baptism is precisely this: to see that God has thrown horse and rider into the sea, that your enemies have been destroyed without any effort on your part so that you have a life that is complete.

I am saying all this so that you can see the power of this

Word. This Word is not reasoning or things to learn. Christianity is for the simple. As simple as the Virgin Mary was, who received this Word that gave her Good News from God and who accepted it: rejoice, Mary, because in you is going to be born the Messiah, the prince of peace, the savior of mankind.

It is the same Word that you have received: REJOICE, because in you a new creature is going to be born, who is going to save humanity. But how can this come about in me if I am an egomaniac? Don't worry; the Holy Spirit will do this in you. Let it be done to me according to what you have said: AMEN. And the Holy Spirit comes down and fecundates. In the first few days Mary wouldn't have been aware of much and it will be the same for you.

BLESSED ARE YOU BECAUSE YOU HAVE BELIEVED. YOU HAVE ACCEPTED THIS WORD AND HAVE KEPT IT IN YOUR HEART (see Lk 1:42).

THE WORD OF GOD IS ALWAYS AN EVENT. IT IS SOMETHING THAT HAS AN EFFECT AND IS FULFILLED. It is not a set of lessons to explain things. THE WORD OF GOD IS ACTION.

What has happened to those people in this way who have welcomed this Word? It has given fruit in them. They became members of a catechumenal community, they began to love each other, they met together to pray and to listen to the Word of God, as has happened to you.

However, it is perfectly possible that as yet the community has nothing in writing. It lives only on the Word that has been announced to them and in which they believed and that they are beginning to experience, because it has begun to act in them, to become life in them. It is a Word that has the power to become flesh.

Later on, writings appear. BUT THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THE CHURCH IS NOT BORN FROM A BOOK, SHE IS NOT BORN FROM WRITINGS. THE CHURCH IS BORN FROM THE EVENT THAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT ACTING IN THE MIDST OF MEN, JESUS CHRIST, RISEN, WHO JUSTIFIES US, IF HE LIVES IN US.

The same thing happens with the Old Testament. In the New Testament the writings arise after the Church has been born from a Word that has been made flesh in them. First was the living experience of this event. Exactly the same thing happens with Israel.

The first thing that appears in Israel is the event: God created men; he made this marvel that is nature. He gave man dominion over it, that he could live, he could work, he could procreate, he could rule. Then man separated himself from God. (How did this happen in history? How doesn't concern us here. The fact is that it happened.) As soon as man separates himself from God, he comes to know death and because of the fear he has of death he has remained unable to communicate with and to love the other. The other becomes his enemy. Cain kills Abel, the symbol of humanity separated from humanity. The world becomes full of sin, of wars, of murders, of vices, of lusts, until the whole world is submerged under the waters of the flood, the symbol that all of humanity is submerged under death and sin. Humanity walks towards destruction.

AND IT IS HERE THAT GOD INTERVENES TO SAVE MANKIND AND MAKES A COVENANT WITH NOAH, PROMISING HIM THAT HE WILL NOT ALLOW MANKIND TO PERISH, PROMISING HIM THAT MANKIND WILL NOT DIE. This is very important because for Israel this oath that God has sworn, that humanity will not die, will remain as the background of her whole history. And it is very important for us, who have received this Word and have the joy to see that this Word that was given to Noah, that humanity will not die, was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Because in Jesus, you and I will not die.

(When it became fashionable to try to discover exactly how the things that the Bible talks about happened, as in *"The Bible as History,"* when people tried to investigate with their reason all these things that seemed too fantastic, Robert Aaron, in *"The Hidden Life of Jesus,"* said: all this is a profanation of the Word of God. Because for Israel the event that the sea was opened so that the people could pass through and would not perish is the fulfillment of the promise made to Noah. It is a promise that goes beyond them, that transcends them.)

I was making a summary of the history of salvation as explained in the Bible. At first there are some chapters that tell of the progressive separation of man from God; these form the anteroom of the history of salvation. Then Abraham appears. God elects Abraham and with him sets in motion his plan of salvation, which has been announced every time man sins (Adam, Cain, Babel, etc.). With Abraham the promise of salvation is set in motion. Abraham was elected for the benefit of all people on earth. And it does not matter how big the sins are, sin cannot overcome God. However low you fall, you can see the love of God who forgives you. God comes down to the lowest depths to take you out. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more," says St. Paul (Rm 5:20).

Abraham receives a promise that sets him moving. This Word begins to be fulfilled in the people of Israel. This Word of salvation starts moving toward its fulfillment.

The promises are fulfilled in Abraham, in Isaac, in Jacob and in the Hebrews who went down to Egypt. The Word of God is always in movement.

Then Moses appears. God chooses a people for himself. This is the fundamental event: GOD ELECTS A PEOPLE OF SLAVES AND SAVES THEM FROM SLAVERY. God lets himself be known by this people.

So far nothing has been written down. God is intervening with historical events, with facts. These slaves in Egypt probably did not remember their forefathers; we don't know. We do know that they are not even a people; they are a bunch of slaves whose life is hell. Perhaps they had more or less the same religion as the Egyptians. But with the intervention of God a people will be born. Out of all the peoples on earth God looks at this bunch of wretches and he makes himself known to them. God did not make himself known like this to any other people. This is important.

Jesus says that all men are taught by God through the events of their lives (see Jn 6:45). The man who puts his trust in riches will discover one day, through the events of his life,

that his security is false. Whoever makes an idol of his family will one day see his ideal fall to the ground. This is how God instructs all men: pagans, tax collectors, Jews, Cypriots, black or white. All men are taught by God.

BUT TO HELP ALL MANKIND, GOD CHOOSES A PEOPLE and HE MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO THEM, NOT BY WHISPERING THINGS IN THEIR EAR BUT BY ACTING IN THEM THROUGH VERY CONCRETE PERSONS. HE ACTS IN FAVOR OF THIS PEOPLE THROUGH SIGNS AND WONDERS SO THAT THIS PEOPLE WILL NOT ONLY LISTEN BUT WILL SEE, WILL FEEL CAUGHT UP IN THE ACTIONS OF GOD.

God takes this people out of Egypt, then opens the sea, breaks all their deaths for them: the circle of Egypt, the sea, the desert, the lack of bread, the lack of meat, the lack of water, the death brought on by the venomous serpents. GOD OPENS WAYS, THROUGH DEATH, FOR THIS PEOPLE.

The intervention of God with this people is paradigmatic. God makes himself known to Israel as the Lord of death, as the One who saves from death. Each time that death appears, this people denies God and doesn't like this God who cannot be seen. Israel sins constantly and even gets fed up with being God's chosen people. God takes this people out of Egypt and leads them through the desert to manifest himself to them. AT SINAI HE MAKES A COVENANT WITH THE PEOPLE. The pact that he made with Abraham, he now makes with all the people. He makes an oath: he promises them a marvelous land. They only have to do one thing: to believe and trust in his Word. This is the only thing they are asked to do: lean on God. Even if you do not understand anything, do not distrust God because behind everything there is an oath.

Don't look for water today; trust, wait. You think that God must put himself at your service at all costs. The only thing God asks of them is that they be able to follow him.

This is our sin: to want to put God beneath us. We want God to give us the happiness that we want. We are not interested in the happiness that God wants to give us. We want our happiness right now, not tomorrow. This is sin. This is the constant rebellion of Israel.

But little by little, God makes himself known. The other day Farnés was saying to us that the manifestation of God in the history of salvation is progressive. God does not begin by saying to Abraham: I am the only God; the other gods do not exist. He does not say this to him because Abraham would not be able to understand it. Abraham is a polytheist. God only says to him: I am the most powerful of all the gods. God makes himself known without forcing man, in the measure that man is able to know him. It is the same as you do with a child. You do not begin by explaining square roots because he cannot understand you. Square roots are true, but try explaining them to a little child, he does not understand anything. And if you want to tell him that the fire burns, you do not explain the physical properties of fire. You tell him that fire makes him say "ouch" because that's how he will understand you. In the same way, God follows a pedagogy with Israel in his manifestation to them.

This intervention of God in Israel is very important,

because it is an intervention for you. See how here I am not talking about speeches or theories. I AM SPEAKING OF SALVATION FOR YOU. God has inaugurated this salvation for you in history. And this history is set in motion by a promise. This Word that holds a promise pulls events along with it.

God begins to fulfill the covenant he has made with his people and he gives them a marvelous land: the land of the Canaanites. It is a land dominated by seven nations. (These are a symbol of the seven evil spirits, of the seven capital sins, that dominate your land, which you do not rule yet because you are not yet a Christian; this is why there are seven exorcisms in Baptism to destroy these seven nations; God is going to do this for you). When the people see these seven nations, they deny God again: how will such gigantic men let us take the land away from them? It's absurd. They are six feet tall and we come exhausted from the desert with our children, wives and herds! How will we manage to get the land from them? And they doubt God (see Num 13:25-14:10). It's the same thing that you say: How is it possible that I will stop being selfish? It is impossible. But there is something important: the only reference point we have is our past history; we do not see the future before us. So we are in very great danger of thinking that the future does not exist. And so we take the past and we project it in front of us as the future. And so you believe that tomorrow you are not able to change. This is why Christianity is all based on promises for the future. Because what kills us is the memory of our past that is the only thing we know. The past is a dead weight on us. Trust in God! Do not despair! Hope that tomorrow your life can change! If tomorrow does not even belong to you...

God destroys the seven nations. With his power he overthrows them and takes his people into the Promised Land, Palestine, symbol of the land promised to all humanity, which is given in Jesus Christ. The whole history of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus Christ for us. That land is a symbol of the land to which God calls you. This history is your history because this history which God did with Israel is the type of the history of salvation which God wants to do with every man just as the history that God is doing with you today is a type, an example, a sign, so that you may be salt, light and leaven for men.

But the enemy nations want to get their land back and when they attack the people and want to throw them out, God raises up Judges to lead his people and defeat the enemies. Each tribe has its judges, its liberators: Samson, Jephtha, Gideon, etc. Read it! It is marvelous because each of these judges is a Word of God. What is contained in these books of the Judges and the other minor prophets are historical accounts.

But then they want a king. They ask God for one and God gives them Saul and the confederation of the tribes becomes a kingdom. This kingdom reaches its climax with David. David is a man who is acceptable to God because he trusts him. When they curse him, David says: And if God allows this man to curse me? (see 2 Sam 16:10-12). He always puts God as the first cause of everything. Because for every believer, God intervenes in everything. And if you fall into some aberration, it is not only

because you wanted to do so but because God has allowed it. And then it is no good crying. Also Esau cried and cried, but he lost his rights as the firstborn. God lifts his hand from your head not to kill you, but to convert you. Because you have put yourself in a situation in which this is the only way that God can manifest himself to you.

When the people have a king, a kind of worldliness appears. The people feel proud, powerful and strong; they forget that they were poor and that in the desert they lived depending on God to send them water, manna, etc. or they would have died. So God sends them into exile, first the kingdom of the north and then the kingdom of the south.

Still there are few writings. What exists are feasts, liturgies, commemorations of their liberation, oral traditions. The marvels that God has done with them are passed on from fathers to children. Because the God they have is different from the gods of the other peoples. The center of their spirituality is found in the celebration of Passover where they recount their history.

The first writings appear with David because by then there is a palace and a library. Then they begin to compile songs and other writings. It seems that the first book that was written was Samuel.

During the exile, the people remember again the promise that God made to them that he would give them a land. Now that they are without it, they think: What's happening? We are slaves again, without happiness. Israel always had their sacrifices of cows, lambs, etc., as did all peoples. God did not destroy any of this. He simply gave these things a new meaning. The feast of spring, which they celebrated like all the peoples, received a new content in the feast of Passover because now they have a greater event than the passage from the death of winter to the life of spring. Now they celebrate the passage from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. God chose that very night of the full moon to act.

In this purification of their sacrificial rites the exile has an enormous importance. God sends them prophets because God never abandons his people nor leaves them in darkness. These prophets will put their history before them and will say: Why are you crying? Don't you remember that God did this for you and that for you? They will discover that their very history is a Word; that there is no difference between history and Word, because God has made himself known in their history. The prophets say: If God acted there, why do you despair? God will act again here because he has not withdrawn his arm. Do not worry! God will take you out of exile. Now in the exile they are waiting for an even greater liberation; now they are waiting for the Messiah, the new Moses.

In addition to this, now in the exile they have no temple. Their spirituality is no longer based upon the sacrifices in the temple. The synagogue appears. There they meet together to receive the consolation of the Scriptures. The Scriptures that recount the action of God are there in their midst to keep hope alive. Now they begin to collect and compile the writings. They

say: Courage, brothers and sisters, straighten your knees, let us get up, let us sing! God will come, because he has not abandoned us! God sends them prophets who enlighten their history, making them see that it is a history that God has done for them. If you take God out of this history, the history itself disappears.

So it is enough to tell the story, to make it present, for God to appear. We only have to gather together to read about the exodus from Egypt and God makes himself present to free us. Because God does not lie; he always fulfills what he promises.

The God who acted in Egypt has not fallen asleep but is alive and on his feet ready to save and to free. We anxiously wait for the night of the Passover during which the Messiah will come.

With Cyrus, they come back from the exile. This is why you will see many songs dedicated to King Cyrus as the Messiah (the anointed one) who has brought them back to the land. But notice that we have two kingdoms that are now united. Each of them has its traditions. Those of the north tell things in a certain way and those of the south in another. When they compile their writings, nothing is destroyed. As a consequence you will see many narratives repeated, like the one of creation. The substance is the same: the form changes just as each catechist gives the catechesis in a different way but the substance is the same. And when they are compiled, you do not make a fusion of the two catecheses, but you keep both. Israel discovers that all the writings are precious and does not destroy any of them. They are placed next to each other.

Back in their land they now have the synagogue and have discovered the celebration of the Word (see Ne 8:1-12). It is on this, above all, that they base their spirituality, meeting to recount their history and to rejoice, to sing and to pray. They have discovered the consolation of the Scriptures.

Ezra and Nehemiah restore the Torah and edit and put in order all the writings. With the experience of centuries, they now reflect on their history and begin to write about their origins. In fact, the first eleven chapters of Genesis in their present form were among the last, not the first, to be written. In these writings they project the faith that they have experienced in God. They are written with an impressive wisdom because they come from the experience of faith. They see that they lack a preamble to their history of salvation and they write it, projecting into it their experience of sin, of creation, etc.

God has been purifying their history. At the beginning, they understood the law as being a pact that implied obligations on both sides. The pacts they knew were like that: they would fulfill the commandments and God would fulfill his part. But through the experience of history, they discover that this law cannot be accomplished. The prophets announce a greater liberation to them: there will come a day, says Ezekiel, in which I, Yahweh, will put the Torah in your hearts and no one will teach anyone else. You will all be instructed by me. I shall take from you this heart of stone and I shall give you a

heart of flesh. I shall pour out my Spirit on you (see Ez 11:19-20; Jer 31:31-34; Joel 3:1-5). They no longer hope for a simple material or physical liberation; God has spiritualized them little by little.

God, for example, doesn't tell them since the beginning that there is life after death. You will find many writings that confess that they do not know what happens to the spirit after death. God manifests himself little by little. This is why Jesus Christ comes in the fullness of time, when the time of the intervention of God is ripe. So we find books like Ecclesiastes that are very pessimistic about the after life (see Qo 3:16-22). They do not deny it; they only say that they do not know. After the exile, we see that God has already revealed that there is a life after death; the person who fulfills the law will live forever. They begin to believe in the life hereafter (Job 19:25-27; Ws 3:1-11; 2 Mac 12:38-45).

That is why I always say that to believe that Christianity is a law and that whoever accomplishes it goes to heaven as a prize and whoever does not goes to hell is not enough. For then why was it necessary for Jesus Christ to come when the Book of Wisdom already says this? The Jews already knew this without Jesus Christ. It had already been said that you must be honest, love one another, not be unjust, pray to God, fulfill the law, lean on God and that whoever does this would live and whoever does not do it would be condemned in a judgment which would take place after death. They also already believed in the resurrection of the dead because when Martha cries over Lazarus' death, Jesus says: "Your brother will rise again," and Martha answers: "I know that he will rise... at the last day" (see Jn 11:23-24). They already know this. But what is new of Jesus is what he says next: "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE: WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME, EVEN IF HE DIES, WILL LIVE, AND WHOEVER LIVES AND BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER TASTE DEATH" (see Jn 11:25).

This is what is new. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you will not taste death. This is the Good News repeated so many times in the Gospel of St. John (see Jn 5:24; 8:51; 8:52; 11:25). For the person who believes in Jesus Christ, death is like falling asleep. You go to bed and you fall asleep without knowing when. That is how you will die, like falling asleep. That is why the Church calls the dead "those who have fallen asleep in the Lord." You die as if you are falling asleep and you awake in the resurrection. In an instant you pass from this world to glory, whether or not millions of years have gone by. This is why we Christians do not weep for our dead as the pagans do, for our brothers and sisters who die are alive. In fact Jesus says: "God is not a God of the dead but of the living" (see Lk 20:38). But the Christian does not believe this just because he has been told so. THE CHRISTIAN HAS WITHIN HIMSELF THE GUARANTEE OF HIS RESURRECTION BECAUSE THE SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST, THE CONQUEROR OF DEATH, LIVES IN HIM and THIS IS MANIFESTED IN THE FACT THAT HE DOES WORKS OF ETERNAL LIFE, OF THE RISEN ONE, LOVING THE OTHER MORE THAN DEATH (see Heb 11:1).

St. Paul says that we have our hope and consolation in the Scriptures because they speak about what will happen; they nourish our hope (see Rm 15:4).

These Scriptures, which were compiled under the inspiration of God, through the Spirit of God, are, without the Spirit of God, a dead letter, a skeleton. Only the One who wrote this book has the power to open it, for this book is sealed (see Rev 5). For this skeleton to take flesh, it is necessary that the Scriptures are opened by one who, through the Spirit, is witness to them because they are fulfilled in his life. A pagan cannot understand anything in it. BECAUSE CHRISTIANITY IS NOT WRITINGS (see 2 Cor 3:6); IT IS AN EVENT, IT IS A LIVED EXPERIENCE. Try telling your cousin who is an atheist about the Easter Vigil you celebrated. He will die laughing. Tell him about the convivences you have... a pagan who reads this book at least would say: What a sublime example this heroic Jesus Christ gives, giving his life for his enemies! And he will add: But let's see your grandpa do it!

THESE SCRIPTURES TAKE LIFE FROM THOSE IN WHOM THEY ARE FULFILLED, THOSE WHOM THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES SING AND LIVE THEM, THOSE WHO READ THESE BOOKS AND CRY, THOSE WHO FEEL THEM LIKE A BALM IN THEIR HEART BECAUSE WHAT IS HERE IS A REALITY THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED. This book says nothing to the person who does not have this experience. If the Scriptures say something to you, it is because the one who manifests himself in this book is the same one who has appeared to you. Because the events narrated here are the events of someone who has acted in you too. BECAUSE YOU SEE THAT THIS HISTORY IS YOUR HISTORY.

That is why when you go to the community and the Scriptures are opened and proclaimed and they do not say anything to you, tremble! Because you are outside of them. If when these Scriptures are proclaimed, you find yourself inside them and see that they say something because they are fulfilled in you, rejoice, sing! This is why Christians respond with singing to the reading that has been proclaimed. Rejoice because you are in the way, because with your presence you testify that this is true.

THE SCRIPTURE, WITHOUT A CHURCH, WITHOUT A PEOPLE WHO BEARS WITNESS TO IT, IS A DEAD LETTER.

That is why we must read this book every day.⁵ This book is our food.⁶ Our whole life is written here. It is the ritual of

⁵ CCC 133: The Church "forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful... to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,' by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'" (DV 25; see Phil 3:8 and St. Jerome).

⁶ CCC 104: In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, "but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess 2:13). "In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them" (DV 21).

CCC 131: "And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life" (DV 21). Hence "access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to

your life: your birth, what is happening to you now, everything that happens to you, your crises, your exiles, your liberations. You have it all written here. That is why to know the Scriptures is to know yourself. Put yourself in contact with the Scriptures with humility and, little by little, the Holy Spirit will introduce you to them.⁷ This Scripture will be the greatest consolation in your life and will move you to prayer.

The Easterners say that this book exorcises. Even if you do not understand it, the demons understand it and tremble. Even to read the Scriptures by yourself will be a great strength for you. Vatican II says that the real renewal will come when this book becomes the book of prayer for all Christians.⁸

(Carmen)

As you have seen, Kiko has explained how the Scriptures were formed and what the difference is between the Word of God and the Scripture, even if he did so without being explicit.

People will understand this along the way, as it becomes an experience for them, not because you tell them. That is why all these Bible courses which are so fashionable today, never lead people into the Word. People enter into the Word through the celebrations, when the Word becomes an event and the Spirit acts.

St. John finishes the Gospel by saying: "There were many other things that Jesus did; if all were written down, the world itself, I suppose, would not hold all the books that would have to be written" (Jn 21:25). From this we can see that there is a series of events that were not written down.

The events that were a Word for Israel cannot be contained in the writings. For Israel, Word means action. We come from a Hellenistic mentality in which the word is logos in the sense of idea, of thought and so it is very difficult for us to understand the Word. Revelation has always been spoken about much more than Word has. We understand Revelation as an abstract teaching, a series of ideas. In the seminaries Revelation was basically studied as a compendium of truths or treatises about things that God has said. For Israel it is not like this. The Word is an event and events cannot all be summarized in writing.

This is why Jesus Christ did many more things than St. John is able to write about and it is why St. John says that even if the world were full of books, it would not be possible to put together all the events that they experienced in Christ.

the Christian faithful" (DV 22).

⁷ CCC 137: Interpretation of the inspired Scripture must be attentive above all to what God wants to reveal through the sacred authors for our salvation. What comes from the Spirit is not fully "understood except by the Spirit's action" (see Origen, Hom. in Ex. 4, 5: PG 12,320).

⁸ CCC 141: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord" (DV 21): both nourish and govern the whole Christian life. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105; see Is. 50:4).

The same thing happens with all the action of the Old Testament. God manifested himself in his action and this cannot be summed up in writings. THE WORD OF GOD, WHICH IS THE INTERVENTION, THE EVENT, THE ACTION OF GOD, PRECEDES THE SCRIPTURES. Jesus Christ died and rose again and never wrote anything, but he was a living event incarnated in history, a living Word. He accomplished many events and besides that, he left the living message in the heart of his apostles without being afraid that they would distort it and without giving them a written summary for them to preach. HE LEFT THE EVENT OF THE RESURRECTION ALIVE IN THE SPIRIT.

It is the same for Israel that is a living people, God's transmitter. Israel is not a writing but a Word of God, a living event. It is the same with the apostles. They are witnesses because they live the event, not only because they have seen it with their eyes. Because the resurrection is not enough for them without Pentecost when they experience the action of the resurrection in themselves.

That is, all the actions of God are life and life and, like the sea, cannot be contained in bottles or containers. You can write many letters to your girlfriend, but you are much more than these letters; although your life may be within the letters, you are much more than the letters.

The Word of God precedes the Scriptures.

IT ALSO ACCOMPANIES IT. It is as though you have a live liquid in a saturated solution and you let it stand and it begins to crystallize. The crystals are part of the liquid. In the same way, the written summaries which begin to appear are part of this life that has taken place but do not contain all of it. The Word is a transmission of life and action, an Other One who makes contact with you. That is why Israel never talks about ideas or writes treatises. That is why the Shema, Listen, Israel! is the summary of the whole Word for them (see Mt 22:34-40): an Other One who enters into your existence. The mother's word is the mother herself entering into the life of the child, giving him life. God entered into the history of Israel by acting, that is, he is Word.

St. Luke says: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of THE THINGS WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED AMONG US, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed" (Lk 1:1-4).

That is, after a whole life, a crystallization, a summary of that life begins to appear. The Scriptures begin to appear. God wanted the Scriptures to be like that: to leave a faint trace.

Just as we have a skeleton that supports the life we have, this framework that is the Scriptures, is preceded, accompanied by and surpassed by the Word.

The Word is much more than the Scriptures.

That is why the Scriptures can never be separated from the body that gives them life; otherwise they are a dead skeleton. They can never be separated from this body that has lived them, that has written them and that continues to carry them. This body is the Church, the people of God. These Scriptures without the Church, without the people of God, are nothing; they would become mute, they would be a skeleton.⁹

The children of Israel know them before being able to read because they receive them from the live voice of another person who gives them the Word pronounced in faith. It is the family, the father, who transmits the faith, not with a book but with his own life.

And so the book is not important, even in the Church. This is why the Church has always defended against the Protestants the making explicit and the channeling of the Word within the living Tradition. The writing is less than life. It is in the assembly that the book acquires life. That is why inviting the Bishop to give out the Bibles is not, as many think, a trick or a technique to get the Bishop on your side, but it is a catechesis given to the people: this book in itself is nothing, but it is the apostles, the Bishops, who hand over the book because they have the power to open the Scriptures.

It is in the Church that this book takes on life because there the Spirit is working and alive in Christians. It is in this living Spirit that the book acquires life. This Spirit is what gives it force and soul.

The risen Christ opens the apostles' intelligence so that they can understand the Scriptures (Lk 24:25-27).

And at the Transfiguration (see Mt 17:3), Jesus Christ appears with Moses and Elijah (the law and the prophets) so that all the Word of God is seen as a perfect unity in Jesus Christ. There is not one God in the Old Testament and another in the New. (We invented all this when we did not understand anything).¹⁰ JESUS CHRIST RISEN HAS NO OTHER MEANING THAN THAT OF BEING THE FULFILLMENT OF THE SCRIPTURES, the internal axis of this whole event, which is the Word of God. For it is one event: God intervening in history, God who makes himself known by accomplishing this Word. By becoming a reality, this Word is

⁹ CCC 95: "It is clear therefore that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls" (DV 10).

¹⁰ CCC 123: Christians venerate the Old Testament as true Word of God. The Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the New has rendered it void (Marcionism).

CCC 140: The unity of the two Testaments proceeds from the unity of God's plan and his Revelation. The Old Testament prepares for the New and the New Testament fulfills the Old; the two shed light on each other; both are true Word of God.

making God present. JESUS CHRIST RISEN WOULD HAVE NO MEANING IF HE WERE NOT THE FULFILLMENT OF WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED, BECAUSE IT IS IN THIS THAT GOD MANIFESTED HIMSELF: IN THE FULFILLMENT OF THIS WORD.¹¹

All this will be something the people will discover in the future, but it can help you a little now to make the people understand the difference between the Word of God and Scripture.

These Bible study courses that are fashionable don't last long because since the Spirit is not there, the Spirit is present in a community that meets to pray and to proclaim the Word, they end up being a bore. As soon as a few things that at the beginning are interesting as information and as a novelty have been learned, the next session is already a dead bore. This is because life is not there because there is no personal experience in which God makes himself present as a reality, witnessing to his being.

Something else that is in fashion is to say: God has intervened with Israel but continues to intervene always, now in Vietnam, etc. This is to treat this book as unimportant. People who say this read the newspapers in their meetings. They tell what is happening in the world because what the Bible says is too old and it has nothing to say to us. This is not true at all. Of course God continues to act today in history but so does evil. So to distinguish between what is the intervention of evil and what is his intervention, God has given us a norm that is this Word that is written here in the Bible and not in the newspaper. To be able to discern what there is of good and what there is of bad in Vietnam we have this norm. These Scriptures, lived in the Church, allow us see how God continues to intervene in history. The Church is an event that judges the nations. Every human event is judged by a living Church.

How were these books written? It is easier to understand this with the New Testament. Jesus Christ did not write anything. After they receive the Holy Spirit, the Apostles start to preach, not beginning with episodes that took place or detailed particulars, like the miraculous catch of fish, for example, but proclaiming that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and is speaking today through us because we are full of the Holy Spirit. They go to the center, to the embryo, to the nucleus, which is the kerygma. Then this kerygma will be made explicit.

That is, first there is a kerygma and then an instruction or catechumenate. That is why the Gospels come after the kerygma, like a summary of the catechesis of the catechumenate

¹¹ CCC 102: Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely (see Heb 1:1-3).

You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time (St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 103, 4, 1: PL 37, 1378; see Ps 104; Jn 1:1).

of the primitive Church.

The first writings (without taking into account the recent discoveries about the Gospel of St. Mark, which don't, however, alter the substance of what we're saying) were the Letters to the Thessalonians that date from 53 AD. Think of how many years the Church had already been in existence by then without having anything written. The first thing that the Church does is to preach, celebrate and live. That is why the oldest documents are always liturgies, songs of exultation.

The first thing we wrote down in the shanty town was the Song of the Servant of Yahweh and for the same reason: because the event is made explicit in the liturgy, in songs.

The oldest part of the Old Testament is a passage from Deuteronomy, which narrates: "My father was a wandering Aramean... God took me out of Egypt... and gave us this land, a land where milk and honey flow" (see Dt 26:5-9). Then this nucleus of the Old Testament will become explicit, like the kerygma of the New Testament. This is the kerygma of the Old Testament, the most primitive credo of Israel. These elements will later become much more explicit (the stories of the patriarchs, the law of Sinai, the creation, etc.) and these themes remain open to an even more complete relation.

Everything that is written replies to a lived, much older, experience.

The real compilation is done after the return from exile, with Ezra and Nehemiah. The priests gather together all the traditions and give them a liturgical sense. That is why the account of creation begins like a hymn.

First of all, there is an event that can never be codified in writing and is handed down by oral tradition. Then there appear simple writings and then more complex collections.¹² And

¹² CCC 76: In keeping with the Lord's command, the Gospel was handed on in two ways:

- orally "by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received - whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (DV 7);

- in writing "by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing" (DV 7).

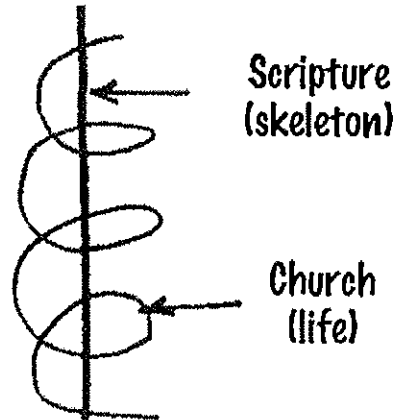
CCC 80: "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal" (DV 9). Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own "always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

CCC 81: "Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit" (DV 9).

"And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord

the most ancient things that are written are always basically liturgical.

THE WORD ALWAYS PRECEDES, ACCOMPANIES AND SURPASSES THE SCRIPTURES. TODAY THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THESE SCRIPTURES TAKE LIFE IS ALIVE. THAT IS WHY A CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY THAT PROCLAIMS THE SCRIPTURE IS ALWAYS MUCH MORE THAN THE BOOK: IT IS THE SPIRIT THAT GIVES THEM LIFE.



THE WORD precedes
 accompanies
 surpasses
SCRIPTURE

(Kiko)

You must tell the people to bring their Bibles next time and something to eat for the agape.

and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching" (DV 9).

FIFTEENTH DAYCELEBRATION OF THE WORD
AND HANDING OVER OF THE BIBLE

Catechism of the Catholic Church: It is Christ who speaks when Sacred Scripture is proclaimed in the Church (1088, 1373); the liturgy of the Word (1154-1155, 1190); the lectern (ambo) (1184); Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church (131-133, 2653-2654, 2691, 2705, 2762); the Church built up by the Word of God (507, 777, 789).

(You have to prepare the church for the celebration and the room for the agape. The arrangement of the assembly is the same as for the celebration of Penance but with a table on one side where, as people arrive, they leave their own Bibles, having first written their names on them. Explain the meaning of the celebration to the Bishop and the presbyters and how it will be done. Practice the songs.¹)

¹ CCC 1156: "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy" (SC 112). The composition and singing of inspired psalms, often accompanied by musical instruments, were already closely linked to the liturgical celebrations of the Old Covenant. The Church continues and develops this tradition: "Address... one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart." "He who sings prays twice" (Eph 5:19; cf. St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 72, 1: PL 36, 914; Col 3:16).

CCC 1158 : The harmony of signs (song, music, words and actions) is all the more expressive and fruitful when expressed in the cultural richness of the People of God who celebrate (see SC 119). Hence "religious singing by the faithful is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises as well as in liturgical services," in conformity with the Church's norms, "the voices of the faithful may be heard." But "the texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine. Indeed they should be drawn chiefly from the sacred Scripture and from liturgical sources" (SC 118;121).

SCHEMA
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE HANDING OVER OF THE BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

GENERAL MONITION

ENTRANCE SONG: "I See Heaven Open"

GREETING OF THE PRESIDENT

- Man does not live by bread alone but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.
- May the grace...

PRAYER OF THE PRESIDENT

INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

MONITION TO THE FIRST READING

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 6:4-15

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

SONG: "O Lord, You Are My God"

MONITION TO THE SECOND READING

SECOND READING: Isaiah 55:1-13

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

SONG: "Pentecost"

MONITION TO THE THIRD READING

THIRD READING: Acts 13:13-39

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

SONG: "He Rose From Death"

MONITION TO THE GOSPEL

GOSPEL: John 1:1-18

ECHO OF THE WORD BY THE ASSEMBLY

HOMILY OF THE PRESIDENT

CELEBRATION OF THE HANDING OVER
OF THE BIBLE

Without forming a line, everyone collects his own Bible from the table, gives it to the catechist and tells him his name. The catechist gives the Bible to the President, telling him the name of the person who is going to receive it. Holding one end of the Bible in both hands, the President gives it to the person saying:

15th day: Celebration of the Word of God

N., receive the promises
made to your forefathers.
Receive them fulfilled in our Lord Jesus.
May this Word,
accepted by you,
bring you to life.

*The person receiving the Bible holds it with both hands and
replies:*

Amen.

SONG: "Amen, Amen, Amen"

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

OUR FATHER

CONCLUSION

KISS OF PEACE

BLESSING

AGAPE.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD
WITH MONITIONS AND INTRODUCTIONS TO THE SONGS

(From the tape-recording of the celebration for the handing over of the Bible in the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians, Barcelona, 1971.)

INTRODUCTION

GENERAL MONITION

(Kiko)

I hope, brothers and sisters, that today will be a memorable one for you all because you are going to receive from the Church this Word, the Scriptures, and give your "Amen" to the Word of God.

After the first part of the catechesis, in which we announced to you the kerygma, the Good News that Jesus Christ was sent by God to free us from death and sin so that we have eternal life in him, we responded with a penitential celebration in which we had access to the forgiveness of sins in the victory of the risen Christ, through a sacrament. Today, after seeing this kerygma in the Scriptures, not making a biblical study of the history of salvation, not studying how it was formed and how it developed, but by giving you a taste of this Word through Abraham and the Exodus, we will also respond with a celebration.

I hope that you have all seen how you are Abraham and how the Exodus is your history; how God doesn't abandon you but sends a Word to enlighten your existential reality. The response to this Word that you have listened to is this liturgy, this meeting, where those who have already tasted this Word and seen its marvels, today are able to say "Amen," to say that they want to live this Word.

You must receive this Word from the Church. You can't interpret this Word for yourselves, but, like bread, it must be broken for you by the Church. The Book of Revelation says that this book is sealed and that everyone cries because no one can open it. But a slaughtered lamb appears, and to him is given the power to open the Book (see Rev 5). Whoever has the Spirit of this slaughtered lamb, who is Jesus our Lord, will also be able to open these Scriptures. During this catechumenate the Church will give you this Spirit so that you will be able to understand these books with wisdom, so that these Scriptures become Word of God for you.

We also said, brothers and sisters, in the last catechesis, that this book is a skeleton that needs life, flesh and nerves in order not to be dead. And we said that these Scriptures receive life in the Christian assembly in which the risen Christ is present.

We have all assembled here today because the risen Christ is present here, and it is he who will make us taste this Word that is proclaimed. Because if Christ doesn't open our ears,

this Word remains closed to us and says nothing to us; it doesn't enlighten our reality.

The best way to present the Word is to celebrate it.² This group of books was collected by a people and was transmitted to us, waiting for a people who would fulfill it more perfectly, a people in whom this Word is fulfilled. We know that THIS WORD MADE FLESH IS OUR LORD JESUS, IT IS JESUS CHRIST. HE IS THE WORD OF GOD. WHOEVER SEES JESUS KNOWS GOD BECAUSE HE IS GOD. And we know that he is present here, risen, to make this Word resound in our midst, to open our ears and prepare our hearts, so that the Word may penetrate us and fecundate us. Because we, like a dry and arid land, need a rainfall that may soak into us so that we may have life. This Word will be the water that will give us life.

I don't think there's anything more important in your life than this assembly, where the risen Christ is going to appear through the Word of God.³ That's why it is not a matter of being in a hurry. The Letter to the Hebrews already complained about the Christians who were abandoning the assembly (Heb 10:25). Because we are not dealing with a celebration which you must finish in a hurry to go to do something else. It's something

² CCC 1154: The liturgy of the Word is an integral part of sacramental celebrations. To nourish the faith of believers, the signs which accompany the Word of God should be emphasized: the book of the Word (a lectionary or a book of the Gospels), its veneration (procession, incense, candles), the place of its proclamation (lectern or ambo), its audible and intelligible reading, the minister's homily which extends its proclamation, and the responses of the assembly (acclamations, meditation psalms, litanies and profession of faith).

³ CCC 1088: "To accomplish so great a work" - the dispensation or communication of his work of salvation - "Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister, 'the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,' but especially in the Eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them'" (SC 7; Mt 18:20).

CCC 1184: The chair (cathedra) of the bishop or the priest "should express his office of presiding over the assembly and of directing prayer" (*Gen Instr. Roman Missal* 271).

The lectern (ambo): "The dignity of the Word of God requires the church to have a suitable place for announcing his message so that the attention of the people may be easily directed to that place during the liturgy of the Word" (*Gen Instr. Roman Missal*, 272).

much more important. We're here to meet God, and God is going to pass here, in our midst, perhaps in a reading, perhaps in something that one of the brothers will say, in a prayer, or an echo, or in the Homily. You do not know at what moment this Spirit will really take hold of you and give you life. And he will make you leave here happy, after maybe arriving tired and bored, because the meeting with Jesus Christ is always important.

Let us welcome the Bishop who comes to proclaim and hand over this Word to you, to open these books. Let us welcome him, together with the presbyters who accompany him, singing: "What is His name? His name is Word of God!"

We see the heavens open and a white horse coming, the one who rides it wears a cloak full of blood. He is full of his victory: his victory over all that divides us, over everything that makes us suffer. In his blood he has destroyed our enemy. He comes victorious to free us. What is the name of the one who comes? His name is: WORD OF GOD, the Son of God, Jesus Christ (see Rev 19:11-16).

ENTRANCE SONG: "I See Heaven Open"

GREETING OF THE PRESIDENT

- Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.
- May the grace...

PRAYER OF THE PRESIDENT

INVOCATION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

MONITION TO THE FIRST READING

(Kiko)

The first Word to be proclaimed here tonight is from the Book of Deuteronomy. It is a passage that the Jews read in the synagogue every day. The celebration in the synagogue begins with this passage. It starts saying: SHEMA ISRAEL! In Hebrew "Shema" means: "listen." This will also be the first word that we hear tonight: "Listen, Israel!"

We know that we are the Israel of faith (see Gal 6:16). Today the Lord calls us and says to us: "Israel!" which means "strong with God." We know that in him we shall win all the battles against our pride, our anger, our lust and all our problems.

Listen to this Word that says: "Listen, Israel, I am the one God; there is no other apart from me." This Word invites us to love him. He tells us that he is here now among us, and he invites us to a response, to love him above all things. Let us listen to this Word.

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 6:4-15

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG AFTER THE FIRST READING
(Kiko)

Brothers and sisters, this Word is fulfilled among us today.⁴ Today the Lord gives us a command: to love God with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our strength. This is the summary of the Law and the Prophets; this is the whole of Scripture. Whoever does this is already in the kingdom of God.

If we are entering a catechumenate, it is because we are convinced that in us God is not yet the only one, not yet the center, that perhaps there are other gods. That is why today we have been told: When I take you to the land and give you olive trees that you haven't planted, a marvelous land that you haven't bought, fruit trees of every type that you haven't cultivated, houses that you have not built...

Do you see the symbol of the Word of God? The Lord knows that we are on the way towards the Kingdom of God. This catechumenal way ends with the renewal of our Baptism, introducing us, as Christians adult in faith, into the Promised Land, the Kingdom of God, which begins here and jumps to eternal life. The Lord is telling us: When you reach the Kingdom, when you are happy, never forget that it was I who brought you to this catechesis. Do you remember that you came here embittered? Remember when you found yourself in Egypt.

This Word is for you now. It says: remember when you couldn't stand anybody, when you didn't get along with your wife, when you were leading a miserable little life, when you had no joy, when you found yourself in Egypt, in slavery. Remember how things were then. Remember how I led you, step by step, and have now given you happiness: your life has been totally transformed.

Those communities who have seen their life transformed can say this today. But think: All that I have given you, I have given you free: houses you didn't build, land you didn't buy, fruit trees you didn't plant. Remember then that it was I who took you out of Egypt and brought you here. Remember then to bless me, to give me thanks. Remember to teach your children that I am among you, and that I am the One who saved you, so that your children do not adore strange gods.

Perhaps today your children have no other God than the idols of the world: money, fame, prestige, having a good time, everything that the pagans love, that the world loves. Through this Way we shall teach you to rear your children in faith. Look

⁴ CCC 1155: The liturgical word and action are inseparable both insofar as they are signs and instruction and insofar as they accomplish what they signify. When the Holy Spirit awakens faith, he not only gives an understanding of the Word of God, but through the sacraments also makes present the "wonders" of God which it proclaims. The Spirit makes present and communicates the Father's work, fulfilled by the beloved Son.

at what we've heard today: you shall transmit faith to your children, you shall teach them who is the true God. You mustn't leave this mission to schools or other people. You have to personally do it yourself, and not with lessons but with your attitudes to life, with your lived faith, if you have faith its clear. Maybe today your children don't believe because the attitudes they see in you don't convince them at all.

Brothers and sisters, be happy, for God speaks to us with simple words! He tells us to love one another; that it is he who is giving you these catecheses; that it is he who is taking you out of Egypt; that it is he who is bringing you to a land of happiness. Never forget that it is he who is doing this. He is here among us, and the only thing that God asks is that we love him above all idols.

So, brothers and sisters, in answer to this Word of God, let us sing together: "O Lord, you are my God, I will exalt you."

SONG: "O Lord, You Are My God"

MONITION TO THE SECOND READING

(Kiko)

The second Word, brothers and sisters, which God is going to make resound among us tonight is from a prophet, Isaiah. Now the Lord will say to all of us that his Word is like the rain that comes down from the heavens and falls on the earth, fecundating it. It doesn't go back to heaven without having accomplished its mission, without having fecundated the land.

The Word of God is the same. From the moment it comes from God's mouth, this Word starts off on a journey among us and doesn't stop until it has fulfilled its mission. The Word of God is always effective. For those who keep it, it is salvation; for those who reject it, it is condemnation. To those who did not listen to it God gives them an opportunity and says to them: "Come with me. Why spend so much money on things that don't satisfy you?" But they did not listen.

Today, God says this to us too: Come with me. Without your having to buy them, I'll give you things that will satisfy you. I will make you happy. The Lord invites us to put our trust in him, to live from his Word. Afterwards he will ask us if we are happy or not. He invites us to leave this world, this city, where each person seeks life on his own, to come to him. He invites us to set out together as a people in exodus towards the house of God.

I assure you that the mountains will leap like young goats, the whole of nature will rejoice. And we shall be a nation of happy people, who sing, who walk in joy because we are walking towards eternal Life and towards happiness. Let us listen to what this Word tells us tonight.

SECOND READING: Isaiah 55: 1-13

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG AFTER THE SECOND READING

(Kiko)

We have just heard, brothers and sisters, a Word that promises us something marvelous. It says that in place of thorns a cypress will grow, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This means that where our heart hasn't been able to produce any fruits other than selfishness, envy, lust, there will exist something wonderful, freely, by God's work.

It says that we will leave and set out with happiness.

But the Lord invites us to leave our idols and to abandon ourselves to him because our ways are not his ways, as we've heard. Our ways are as far from those of God as the earth is from heaven.

The people of Israel doubt in the desert because they do not understand that, by going through the desert, they will arrive somewhere. What they want instead is for God to comply with their ways. That's just what we want too: God at our service, he must give us what we want: money, fame, health, children, etc. In this Way it is quite the opposite. Up till now maybe you've been looking for things your own way. But in this reading the Lord has told you tonight: Why go on worrying like that, wasting money and effort on things that don't satisfy you? COME WITHOUT MONEY, AND I WILL GIVE YOU THIS LAND THAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.

What we are looking for, brothers and sisters, is the Holy Spirit, the Gift of God, a new Spirit that will give us a life full of happiness, which will make us live an intense life that will really satisfy us. This is why we ask God for this Spirit. We shall sing the song of Pentecost: because this Spirit has already come down on the earth, because the Kingdom of God is near us, because it is getting nearer with this Catechumenal Way.

Perhaps a lot of you have already been in the "Cursillos," the nocturnal adoration group or in some movement. Perhaps, on the other hand, some of you didn't go to church very often, others perhaps every day. Well, I assure you that today the Kingdom of God is nearer to you than ever before.

We've heard also another wonderful thing: listen. The people of God are the people who listen, a people who listen every day to what God says and does. This Holy Spirit is the water that will fecundate the desert, make it into a garden, and make of us, who are the desert, a garden full of flowers, make us bear fruit for the world to see.

The Lord, as we've heard, is going to make an eternal covenant with us. The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, the promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in the blood of Jesus Christ, are going to be made real in us. Jesus Christ has given his blood so that you can live in happiness, enter into the Kingdom, so that your sins are forgiven, and you can love men in a new dimension. So that this can happen, you will receive the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.

So let us sing now, brothers: If you feel a breeze from heaven, a wind shaking the doors; listen, it is a voice that is

calling you, inviting you to travel afar. It is a fire arising in the one who knows how to wait, who knows how to nourish hopes of love, who is patient, who hopes that one day he will be able to love, not through his efforts, but because he has received the grace of God, the Holy Spirit.

SONG: "Pentecost"

MONITION TO THE THIRD READING

(Kiko)

Let us now listen to the apostle Paul who, during his itinerary, arrives at a synagogue. This is the man who had persecuted the Christians, believing them to be a sect of people possessed by demons and who were destroying God's assembly, the people of Israel. He is the man who has been called by God and to whom the risen Jesus Christ has appeared on the road and who, from that moment, has begun to preach from synagogue to synagogue. Today he announces to us, brothers and sisters, the kerygma of Jesus Christ. This kerygma is Jesus Christ risen from the dead, in whom human nature has conquered death so that we no longer die.

The promises that God made to Abraham that he would have given him a land, the promises made to Isaac, to Jacob, the promises made through the manifestations in Exodus, the promises made to David, the promise made to Noah that he would not allow humanity to perish, have all been fulfilled for us by God in Jesus Christ.

You are the first of this generation of 1971 to know this news, while many men live in anguish with their problems, their envy, pride, fear of death and illness, without knowing that God has acted, thinking that all this is the business of religion and priests. They know nothing and have experienced nothing. They think that this is for bigoted women and cowards who can't face up to life. They haven't experienced the power of this Jesus Christ, who is living and risen to give us the guarantee that we don't die, so that our lives can be different, your married life, your work, your whole life, can be different, be happy.

That's why Christians praise and bless God, because he has done marvels in them. Because God has loved us, and he has not abandoned us to death but has sent us a Savior.

Let us listen, brothers and sisters, to this Word, for St. Paul will say: CHRIST HAS GIVEN HIMSELF UP TO DEATH FOR OUR SINS AND HAS BEEN RAISED FOR OUR SALVATION, SANCTIFICATION AND JUSTIFICATION (see Rm 4:25).

THIS IS THE WORD OF SALVATION. THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD. This Word of God is the climax of the whole history of salvation and brings that history to fulfillment. This is what St. Paul tells us.

THIRD READING: Acts 13:13-39

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG AFTER THE THIRD READING

(Kiko)

We have just listened to the Good News that announces that in Jesus Christ we have access to eternal life, that all those who welcome this Word will receive the Holy Spirit. Let us now sing "He Rose From Death," giving our assent to what we've just heard.

SONG: "He Rose From Death"

MONITION TO THE GOSPEL

(Kiko)

The last reading that we are going to hear is the beginning of the Gospel of St. John which starts by saying: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1).

This is a celebration of the Word of God. Perhaps we don't understand it. St. John says: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). This book that you are going to receive contains the Word of God. For in Jesus Christ God has made himself known totally. In him we know why he made the water, the birds and all things. Because in Jesus we know that God created us in Love. Because he has existed since the beginning in God. We have all been created in this love of the Father for the Son.

Those who receive this Word, Christ himself, and let it penetrate their hearts, are not born of flesh nor of blood but of God; they are sons of God.

Let us listen, brothers and sisters, to this Word.

GOSPEL: John 1:1-18

ECHOES OF THE WORD BY THE ASSEMBLY

HOMILY OF THE PRESIDENT

CELEBRATION OF THE HANDING OVER OF THE BIBLE

Without forming a line, everyone collects his own Bible from the table, gives it to the catechist and tells him his name. The catechist gives the Bible to the President, telling him the name of the person who is going to receive it. Holding one end of the Bible in both hands, the President gives it to the person saying:

N., receive the promises made
to your forefathers.
Received them fulfilled in Our Lord Jesus Christ
May this Word,
accepted by you,
bring you to life.

The person receiving the Bible holds it in both hands and replies:

Amen.

SONG: "Amen, Amen, Amen."

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL
OUR FATHER

CONCLUSION

KISS OF PEACE
BLESSING

AGAPE

CONVIVENCE

(Convivence at the end of the catecheses given in the parishes of Our Lady Help of Christians and of St. Isidore, Barcelona. "Mater Salvatoris" retreat house, Tibidabo, December 10-12, 1971. The timetable can, of course, be adapted.)

FRIDAYARRIVAL AND DISTRIBUTION OF ROOMS between 8 and 9 pm

Someone from the catechists' team has to do this service. He should arrive early at the place and arrange the details with those in charge of the retreat house.

One of the members of the team must also be responsible for bringing the following items or make sure that they are available at the place.

- paschal candle and candle-stand;
- lectern and lectern cover;
- processional cross;
- carpets;
- flowers for the celebrations;
- vestments for the priests;
- altar cloths, corporal, purificators;
- one or more big chalices;
- one or more patens;
- altar wine.

DINNER at 9:00 p.m.

LUCERNARIUM at 10:30 p.m.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: God is light (157, 214, 234, 242, 257, 298, 2466); Christ is light (280, 529, 748, 1202, 2715, 2466, 2665); light and darkness (214, 285, 298, 409, 457, 530, 1268, 1691, 1707); the light of faith (26, 89, 286, 298, 2466, 2730).

OUTLINE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE LUCERNARIUM

GENERAL MONITION
CELEBRATION OF THE LIGHT

Convivence: Friday evening

All the lights are turned off. (You need to make sure that no lights, even distant ones, can be seen so that the sign of the darkness may be more significant.)

The assembly remains for two or three minutes in the darkness, in silence, without hurry.

The president, dressed in alb, cincture and stole, enters carrying the paschal candle. At the door he sings the acclamation to Christ, the light of the world, in a loud voice and the assembly replies by singing Alleluia.

P/ CHRIST IS OUR LIGHT AND OUR SALVATION!

R/ Alleluia!

After the acclamation has been sung, the president goes towards the center of the assembly. He stops and sings the same acclamation a second time.

When he arrives by the candle-stand, he turns towards the assembly and sings the acclamation for the third time. The assembly replies and then the whole song of the Alleluia is sung.

The president places the paschal candle into the candle-stand and goes to his seat.

After the song is finished, not before, the lights are switched on.

GREETING OF THE PRESIDENT

PRAYER OF THE PRESIDENT

INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

MONITION TO THE READING OF THE WORD OF GOD

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD:

1 Jn 1; 2:1-11; 3:13-24 (4:7-17 can also be read)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

SONG: "He rose from death" or "Pentecost"

CONCLUDING PRAYER

The president says a prayer for everyone and finishes it by introducing the Our Father.

OUR FATHER

There is no sign of peace.

BLESSING

The president leaves.

Before the assembly is dismissed you have to explain the reason for going to bed in silence. Silence is very important as a sign that we want to stay listening to the Lord who is passing in this convivence.

CELEBRATION OF THE LUCERNARIUM
WITH MONITIONS AND INTRODUCTIONS TO THE SONGS

GENERAL MONITION

Here you have to explain the meaning of the liturgy of the light, particularly its symbolism: the darkness, symbol of our situation of sin and death; the light, symbol of Jesus Christ risen. This light enlightens our reality and enables us to see ourselves.¹

(Kiko)

We have come to this convivence convoked by Jesus Christ. It is he who has called us to the catechesis, who has accompanied us during these two months and has brought us here because he wants to make himself present.

We invite you to leave any worries about your family, your work, thoughts about what happened yesterday or is going to happen tomorrow outside the doors of this place. The past does not exist anymore and tomorrow does not belong to us. We don't even know if we'll be alive tomorrow. In Christianity only today exists. Therefore, we invite you to live this today that the Lord wants to give us and in which he will pass.

You have never been at a convivence; you don't know about the wonderful communion that God wants to generate among us; you don't know the power with which the Lord will pass to open a way for us. Our experience is that you will not leave this place the same as you arrived. Take advantage of this passing of Jesus, like the blind man in Jericho, lifting your eyes towards him who can heal your blindness. We shall begin our convivence with a lucernarium.

It's a very ancient liturgy of the Church. During this Way, God will enable us to rediscover the liturgical signs. Tonight we will begin with two signs that are very simple, yet powerful: darkness and light.

In a while we will turn the lights off and remain in the darkness for a few minutes. The darkness is the symbol of our blindness, of the sin in which we all are. Don't think that we are doing something theatrical. The darkness expresses a reality that is inside us. It's true that darkness exists, just like envy, hatred, adultery, selfishness and death exist. The darkness makes present now something that happens every day in our lives. In the darkness you are alone, unable to see the people near you, feeling only your own breathing. You are in the

¹ CCC 697: *Cloud and light*. These two images occur together in the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. In the theophanies of the Old Testament, the cloud, now obscure, now luminous, reveals the living and saving God, while veiling the transcendence of his glory - with Moses on Mount Sinai (see Ex 24:15-18), at the tent of meeting (see Ex 33:9-10) and during the wandering in the desert (see Ex 40:36-38; 1 Cor 10:1-2) and with Solomon at the dedication of the Temple (see 1 Kings 8:10-12). In the Holy Spirit, Christ fulfills these figures...

deep darkness of your being, unable to love anybody other than yourself.

But in the deep darkness of this room, behold, a light appears, symbol of Jesus Christ. And when this light is raised up, it will break the darkness. And so you'll begin to see that you are not alone, that there are brothers and sisters near you, that there is a way out in your life and in the life of all people.

I invite you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge your blindness with courage. It's true that this light that is entering into your life comes to reveal the darkness that is in you. This Jesus, whom we have nailed to the cross, comes among us risen to take us out of the slavery of darkness and sin, so that among us communion, love, koinonia may begin to appear. This convivence is a privileged moment of communion and will be centered around the Eucharist. The whole day of tomorrow will be dedicated to the Eucharist. We shall work with a questionnaire, you will listen to a catechesis that will surprise you and finally we will celebrate our first Eucharist together.

But on this night, brothers and sisters, God calls us to conversion and invites us to make silence within ourselves to wait for his passage. After this lucernarium we shall go to bed in silence and we shall keep the silence until lauds tomorrow. Silence is difficult. We are full of noises inside us that prevent us from hearing the voice of God. The silence will help us. I invite you to observe this silence, for your sake and out of charity towards your brothers and sisters who need it.

Stay alert. We have not come to this convivence in order to sleep, to rest or be on vacation. Like you, I am waiting for the passage of the Lord. Keep watching, because you don't know when the Lord will pass for you. Perhaps it will be in this lucernarium, as once happened in Japan when a man who was not even baptized could see his whole life in those minutes of darkness and discovered the need to meet this Jesus of Nazareth, risen from the dead. Or perhaps tomorrow. Perhaps in something a catechist says, or in a prayer, perhaps in the Eucharist, or at the moment in which the convivence is coming to an end and you are about to go home disappointed. But I assure you, brothers and sisters, that the Lord will pass for each one of us, to heal us from our sicknesses and to give us the gift of following him on a way of life. St. John Chrysostom says that sin is like a big stone placed on our necks which forces us to be bent double, turned in on ourselves. Jesus the Lord comes to take this stone away from us and give us the gift of conversion, that is, lifting up our heads and looking at him.

So, brothers and sisters, let us stand up and let us begin this convivence with the lucernarium.

CELEBRATION OF THE LIGHT

All the lights are turned off. (You need to make sure that no lights, even distant ones, can be seen so that the sign of the darkness may be more significant.)

Convivence: Friday evening

The assembly remains for two or three minutes in the darkness, in silence, without hurry.

The president, dressed in alb, cincture and stole, enters carrying the paschal candle. At the door he sings the acclamation to Christ, the light of the world, in a loud voice and the assembly replies by singing Alleluia.

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After the acclamation has been sung, the president goes towards the center of the assembly. He stops and sings the same acclamation a second time.

When he arrives by the candle-stand, he turns towards the assembly and sings the acclamation for the third time. The assembly replies and then the whole song of the Alleluia is sung.

The president places the paschal candle into the candle-stand and goes to his seat.

After the song is finished, not before, the lights are switched on.

GREETING OF THE PRESIDENT

PRAYER OF THE PRESIDENT

INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

MONITION TO THE READING OF THE WORD OF GOD

(From the catechesis given by Kiko in Florence, October 1970)

In his first letter St. John says to us: "Brothers, what we have heard, what we have experienced - this we announce to you." After this, he tells us that Christians are sons of the light because God is light and in him there is no darkness.²

The light is precisely that God is love.

The commandment "to love God and to love your neighbor" is an ancient commandment, an everlasting commandment, but St. John says this is now a new commandment, because God makes it possible for us to fulfill it completely, because to a world which didn't know God, God has given it, shown it, fulfilled it through the gift of his Son Jesus Christ. But John will say

² CCC 214: God, "He who is," revealed himself to Israel as the one "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6). These two terms express summarily the riches of the divine name. In all his works God displays not only his kindness, goodness, grace and steadfast love, but also his trustworthiness, constancy, faithfulness and truth. "I give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness" (Ps 138:2; see Ps 85:11). He is the Truth, for "God is light and in him there is no darkness"; "God is love," as the apostle John teaches (1 Jn 1:5; 4:8).

something else that is profound: he who hates a brother, walks in darkness; he does not know where he is going. And he says even more: whoever hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him, has God in him.³ He says too: don't suffer if the world hates you, because you don't belong to the world; but we know that we have passed from a situation of death, from darkness, from the impossibility of loving, to an eternal life which we can experience now, because we love the brothers and sisters.

Let no one be afraid if at this moment he cannot love his brother. This room is full of murderers, but Jesus Christ comes precisely for them. To the murderer who is crucified with him, Jesus says: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (see Lk 23:39-43). Now all his robberies, all his murders, count for nothing. Jesus comes for sick people, he eats with sinners and people get scandalized. But Jesus says, it is the sick that need the doctor, not those who are healthy! (see Mk 2:15-17). If someone here is healthy, if someone manages to love others, to really love others, that is, to give himself to anyone, then he should not stay here, he may go away. Here must stay only the one who is not able to love, who has tried to do that a thousand times and always finds himself facing the same reality, that he is selfish, neurotic, stupid, foolish, narcissistic.

We are not gathering in our name. There is not a formula here that would make us all domineering over others, thinking that we are the best Christians, with a militant Christianity that would go to conquer Rome and the Vatican. We don't conquer anybody; we don't preach a proselytizing Christianity. On the contrary, we are beginning a Way that will bring us to a deep knowledge of our reality, of your reality. Maybe you don't know anything yet, you don't know yourself and deep down you think you are good.⁴ If you walk with Jesus, he will teach you what you

³ CCC 1033: We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: "He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn 3:14-1).

⁴ CCC 1425: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). One must appreciate the magnitude of the gift God has given us in the sacraments of Christian initiation in order to grasp the degree to which sin is excluded for him who has "put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). But the apostle John also says: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8.). And the Lord himself taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses" (see Lk 11:4; Mt 6:12), linking our forgiveness of one another's offences to the forgiveness of our sins that God will grant us.

CCC 1847: "God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us" (St. Augustine). To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins,

are, what your true reality is, what the meaning of sin is. Today nobody believes in sin and evil, people believe only in war: that is the only evil that exists! By discovering your deep reality of sin, you will learn the immense love of God.

May this reading be like a sounding trumpet, not something that condemns us, because all of us are denounced already. But let it be a Good News that is announcing the work that God is going to do with us. From foolish people, he will make us his children able to love as Christ has loved. This is all work of God, so that we may glorify God, thank God and be able tomorrow night to tell him: you are holy and we are witnesses that you have done an incredible work in us, so much so that if we were to tell others about it, they couldn't believe.

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

1 Jn 1; 2: 1-11; 3: 13-24 (4:7-17 can also be read)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

(Kiko)

Is it possible to love, brothers and sisters? Is it possible to love our neighbor more than ourselves? Perhaps it is easy to love a good person, somebody who loves me; but to love an enemy, one who hates me, how is this possible?

Brothers and sisters, God has loved us in this way: he loved us totally, to the last drop of his Son's blood and because of this we know that God loves us.⁵ So if we manage to love like this, it means that God is in us.

Brothers and sisters, from this moment on, you must have only one thing to fear: not loving someone. Brothers and sisters, this is precisely what the community will help us with during the catechumenate. Because the day you don't accept one concrete person who annoys you, or who is always in crisis, someone you don't accept because he kills you, then think about this: you are "excommunicated" from the Church. Because the only thing that guarantees you that you belong to the Church is the fact that God has given you his Spirit and God rejects no one. God does not despise those whom you despise, because God loves everybody. The wonderful thing is in the end precisely this, brothers and sisters: God has gathered us here to convert us

he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:8-9).

CCC 2470: The disciple of Christ consents to "live in the truth," that is, in the simplicity of a life in conformity with the Lord's example, abiding in his truth. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth" (1 Jn 1:6).

⁵ CCC 458: The Word became flesh so that thus we might know God's love: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 Jn 4:9). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

into his children. Our problem is that, deep down, we are people who have been vaccinated by a certain traditional Christianity and we think that we are children of God, Christians, just because we have been baptized and have made our first communion, because we go to Mass on Sundays, we don't steal, we don't kill and so everything is all right. Thank God that things are now changing. There are Marxists and atheists who reject Christianity in front of Christians who live their faith like this.

The important thing, brothers and sisters, is that something is changing. Truly, we were not Christians, we did not know Christianity. We were, so to say, pre-Christians. We had never put ourselves seriously in front of the Word of God, we had never welcomed the new Spirit come down from heaven and because of this we bore no fruit and our Christianity was pitiful. To have faith, brothers and sisters, means to have met Christ resurrected in us, to have a new nature, to be children of God, to have the Spirit of God inside of us, who transforms us.⁶ And you will be able to see the world with the eyes of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ lives in you.

All this can be fulfilled in you. God has called us here to begin a catechumenate together, that is, a way towards this meeting, towards a new birth. At the end of this convivence you will be asked: do you want to continue or not? Think about it. Do you believe that through this Way you will get to be born anew from the Holy Spirit in such a way that your baptism will be an adult reality in your life? At the end of the neocatechumenal Way, when you'll come to renew your baptism in front of the Bishop, which will not mean that you are already a very good Christian. For to be a Christian means to have a deep knowledge of our own reality. It means to love all men and consider oneself as the last one (see Phil 2:3). It means to see men with the same respect with which God sees them. Then your attitude toward others will not be paternalistic, nor one of self-importance, but of love and you will not destroy the world but you'll build it up. No medals will be given to you. We are beginning a way towards adult faith; so that this may be a reality in your life.

If you don't think that God has called you to this meeting, you should not continue. We will go on with just a few people,

⁶ CCC 457: The Word became flesh for us *in order to save us by reconciling us with God*, who "loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins": "the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world," and "he was revealed to take away sins" (1 Jn 4:10; 4:14; 3:5)": "Sick, our nature demanded to be healed; fallen, to be raised up; dead, to rise again. We had lost the possession of the good; it was necessary for it to be given back to us. Closed in the darkness, it was necessary to bring us the light; captives, we awaited a Savior; prisoners, help; slaves, a liberator. Are these things minor or insignificant? Did they not move God to descend to human nature and visit it, since humanity was in so miserable and unhappy a state?" (*St. Gregory of Nyssa*).

but with those who really believe that this Way will bring them to welcome the Spirit of God in them, as the work of God.

Brothers and sisters, let us sing a song so that tonight may be a Pentecost. Let us all sing and believe that the Spirit is already above us and that he is at work in us. Perhaps someone has already opened to the belief that God loves him and that God has looked upon him to give him great joy, to give him sight as he did to the blind man. If you feel yourselves blind, perhaps you already believe that God is looking upon you who are suffering and that he is so powerful that he can make a new creation out of you, raise you, take life out of death.

SONG: "He rose from death" or "Pentecost"

FINAL PRAYER

The President makes a prayer in the name of everyone and finishes it by introducing the Our Father.

OUR FATHER

There is no sign of peace.

BLESSING

The president leaves.

Before the assembly is dismissed you have to explain the reason for going to bed in silence. Silence is very important as a sign that we want to stay listening to the Lord who is passing in this convivence.

⁷ CCC 2717: Contemplative prayer is silence, the "symbol of the world to come" (*St. Isaac of Nineveh*) or "silent love" (*St. John of the Cross*). Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the "outer" man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus.

Council has particularly emphasized, which can help you to live the celebration of the Eucharist.¹

Listening to your replies, I see that "today you will know that he who is passing is Yahweh," as Exodus says (see Ex 12:12), that "today you will know that Yahweh is passing through Egypt." I hope that today may truly be a manifestation of God that we may really see Yahweh passing.

Yahweh's passing always sets in motion. We find ourselves in a society where it seems that to arrive is to "sit down": the bourgeois ideal. So to pass from a mentality of being "seated" to a paschal dynamic, which is the process of change that is happening today in the Church, is a little hard. I say this because it has happened to me personally. Precisely through the answers you gave I can see the distance covered by the Church in just a few years.

If today we really get close to the sources and manage to put ourselves in contact with the exploding volcano that is the Christian Eucharist, that will excite us so much that it will set us in motion as a Sinai.

You will see that God's appearance, his intervention, always causes a tension and sets man in motion. God's intervention provokes and immediately opens a way, a meaning for history and sets existence moving.

All the values that civilization or even philosophy of history have today, the whole view of history in a linear sense, are biblical values, because the God who appears in the Scriptures is not a God of a concept or an idea. If you look for an abstract definition of God in the Scriptures, you won't find one. However, you only have to open the Scriptures anywhere and you'll find a living God, a God who really affects the lives of men and history. A God who appears, who "is seen."

This appearing of God immediately opens a way, gives a meaning to the human being. Therefore God appears and Abraham sets out on his journey. God appears and slaveries are broken, ways are opened in the sea, paths are opened in the desert. God appears and life has a meaning, a horizon opens up in front of you and there is happiness. That's why when God appears, eternity enters into time and everything has a meaning. Man recovers his meaning. And so man exults at the appearance of God.

The Eucharist is primarily an exultation, a response to the intervention of God.

And this intervention of God is not an idea, it's an historical event; it's something that can be experienced and that history has experienced, that men have experienced.

In order to go on talking, I should first explain some concepts, say what faith is and say what the Eucharist is, because when I speak of faith and of the Eucharist each of us thinks of something different.

¹ On the Eucharist as source and summit of Christian life, see CCC: 1322-1327.

One of the terms we must clarify in order to go on talking is FAITH. We've built up concepts and theories about faith; we've given definitions of faith which are everything but what faith really is in the Scriptures. In the Scriptures, faith is a guarantee and a profound experience, it is an historical, experiential knowledge, it is an event that you can experience.

The Apostles have seen God in Jesus Christ, they have experienced him and then they confess him.

Faith is not a doubt or darkness or a "leap in the dark," as beautiful as this definition may be, that was given by Pascal. It's completely the opposite: faith is a meeting with the Absolute, with God. Faith is full knowledge to such an extent that, as theology says, it's reasonable, for it doesn't oppose reason in any way. For there are many dimensions in man that are much higher than intelligence and that are not feelings. They're much deeper than feelings and much more stable than the unconscious. It is in the absolute depths of man, in the man's being, call it conscience or whatever you like, that this meeting with God takes place, which goes beyond reason because it goes much deeper. It's in the absolute fullness of being that man can perceive God's appearance with this perfection that the knowledge of faith gives. Faith is an experiential knowledge. It's not a kind of rational knowledge in the Hellenistic sense. For the Bible, knowledge is always an experiential knowledge.

For the Apostles there are no doubts. For them faith is not a doubt. The Apostles have lived an event. This event is not only seeing with the physical senses that Jesus Christ has risen from death. For what does it matter to St. Peter to physically see Jesus Christ risen? For St. Peter the fact that a dead man would return to life is reason for fear: Jesus Christ looks like a ghost to him. And what does it matter to us that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead?

Faith in the resurrection doesn't just presuppose that Christ is raised from the dead; it presupposes living the resurrection of the dead, to have received the life-giving Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ, eternal life, to be a witness. Because the work that God did in raising Jesus Christ doesn't finish with him, but is for them, for St. Peter and the Christians. They have faith because they experience and live Jesus risen within them. He who has had this meeting with God, who has experienced this manifestation of God has faith. That's why I say that the Scriptures don't define God nor give concepts about an abstract God, but like the Apostles do, they confess and proclaim an experience of God, what God is.

God's appearance immediately provokes an answer in man. This answer is exactly what the EUCHARIST is. According to our mentality, the word "Eucharist" is in practice only synonymous to the eucharistic species, the bread and the wine, in particular the hosts reserved in the tabernacle. But this is a misuse of the word. The bread and wine are the "eucharistic species." In its original meaning and in what it is for the primitive Church, the word "Eucharist," as we shall see, is not this. For them "Eucharist" is above all what is expressed by the

Hebrew word "*Beraka*."² Eucharist is essentially the response to the intervention of God. The intervention of God immediately provokes an exultant response, a feast.

The heart of the Eucharist is exultation, happiness, feast, an incredible joy. The intervention of God in Mary immediately produces in her the *Magnificat* (see Lk 1:46-55). The *Magnificat* is a *Beraka*, a true Eucharist, a real response of exultation.³

This exultation, which is the heart of the Eucharist, makes it above all a proclamation, a confession of God's deeds, of what he has done. The intervention of God that takes Israel out of Egypt - and all the historical and concrete interventions of God that Israel has perceived in her life: that the bonds of slavery are broken and freedom is opened, that God sets them moving, etc. - immediately provokes in them a response which is the PASSOVER, a great feast, a great Paschal Eucharist.

A Eucharist is essentially a proclamation, before being an act of thanksgiving. An act of thanksgiving is also too little for what the Eucharist is which also includes acts of thanksgiving. But essentially - and before giving thanks to God for something you've received, as in a business exchange - it is a proclamation, a confession of what God has done.

This proclamation is not because God is great in the sense described by the Homeric hymns or the hymns of the pagan religions where they sing to a God who is great in the firmament, in the stars, the planets, in general, in an abstract way. It is a proclamation of the powerful God who "has done great things in me," as the *Magnificat* says (see Lk 1:49). I am

² On the different names given to the sacrament of the Eucharist, refer to CCC 1328-1332:

CCC 1328: The inexhaustible richness of this sacrament is expressed in the different names we give it. Each name evokes certain aspects of it. It is called: *Eucharist*, because it is an action of thanksgiving to God. The Greek words *eucharistein* (see Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24) and *eulogein* (see Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22) recall the Jewish blessings that proclaim - especially during a meal - God's works: creation, redemption and sanctification.

CCC 1329: ... *The Breaking of Bread*, because Jesus used this rite, part of a Jewish meal, when as master of the table he blessed and distributed the bread (see Mt 14:19; 15:36; Mk 8:6, 19), above all at the Last Supper (see Mt 26:26; 1 Cor 11:24). It is by this action that his disciples will recognize him after his Resurrection (see Lk 24:13-35) and it is this expression that the first Christians will use to designate their Eucharistic assemblies (see Acts 2:42. 46; 20:7, 11); by doing so they signified that all who eat the one broken bread, Christ, enter into communion with him and form but one body in him (see 1 Cor 10:16-17).

³ CCC 2097: To adore God is to praise and exalt him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the *Magnificat*, confessing with gratitude that he has done great things and holy is his name (see Lk 1:46-49). The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world.

a witness, says Israel, of the great things that God has done: he opened the sea, Pharaoh was buried, etc. We are witnesses. It wasn't our work; they were works of God. Thus do they confess and proclaim it.

The Eucharist is essentially a response, a proclamation, a confession and thanksgiving to God for his Word, which is action, made present in a sacred action.

The God who appears in the Scriptures is not a God who stays sitting down. "Today you will know that he who is passing is Yahweh." It is the passing of God that carries everything after him and sets mankind in motion, sets the historical existence in motion. The Apostles will see in this risen Jesus who is passing Yahweh who is passing. "The hour has come for me to pass from this world to my Father" (see Jn 12:23; 13:1).

This dynamic of the passing of Yahweh can be seen throughout Scripture. Yahweh is the *merkabah*, the "chariot of fire" (see Ez 1). God's appearance always causes a tension, dynamism, opens a way that is glorious.

Jesus says: "My hour has arrived" (see Jn 12:23). The Son of Man will be glorified, lifted up and exalted. He will be set in motion. And also Jesus Christ risen, who appears to the apostles, sets them on the way and you shall meet them always on the way. The risen Jesus never stops. In the Gospels Jesus is always recognized in the breaking of the bread, because, as Kiko has told you many times, the Gospels that we have today are basically the compilation of the experience of the primitive Church. And the primitive Church, which experienced Jesus Christ, what was the first thing that she did? To write something? No! The first thing she did was to sing, celebrate the Eucharist, exult, proclaim the great things that God has done.

The apostles are men scattered by the cross, men to whom the cross has shown their sin. Jesus Christ dead on the cross has made it possible for St. Peter to recognize himself as a sinner. The cross of Jesus Christ has scattered all the apostles. But Jesus Christ risen from death has appeared to them, not as a specter, as a ghost, but with flesh and blood, with a new body and they have seen him. Not only because they have seen him with their own eyes but above all because Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and constituted life-giving Spirit, has gathered them, has given them his Spirit of the resurrection and formed the first "Church" which is therefore the work of God, work of the living Spirit of the risen Christ. Jesus Christ risen from death gathers the apostles and establishes the first full communion among men, which is communion in the Holy Spirit, unity in one Spirit, the Spirit of Christ risen from the dead.

The first thing this apostolic Church does is to sing, proclaim, exult, celebrate the Eucharist. So you will see that long before the written Gospels exist, a life exists, just as it happened to Israel, because God has intervened and is history. God isn't someone who has appeared on the clouds to dictate things or lessons of theology (I am One, Triune and I don't know how many more things). God has intervened, has accomplished a

series of events and has left, living in men, this revelation of himself, has left such a presence of eternity within history.

This has provoked a life, a way and a response, in man. This is why the first thing that the primitive Church does is to celebrate the Eucharist. And all the appearances of the risen Christ are told within a Eucharistic context. They always recognize him at the breaking of the bread, because the primitive Church gathers to celebrate the Eucharist and it is there that she perceives the resurrection of Jesus Christ most clearly. Why? Because they are in communion, it is a Church whose members love each other. The barriers of selfishness among men have been broken and something as impressive as the Church, a communion among men, has been achieved.

With all this, what I want to say is fundamentally that there is a Word that runs throughout Scripture: PASSOVER.

In this catechesis we are going to see what Jesus Christ has done at the last supper.⁴

It's very difficult to understand this because we have turned the Eucharist into something totally static, which we can manipulate: a baby Jesus whom we can take to our breast when we want... Instead, the Eucharist is totally the opposite because in it God is passing and carries all humanity with him. Because it is clear that this work that God did in Jesus, by raising him from the dead, giving a new spirit to humanity, is not abstract ideas but something which can be perceived, which the apostles and the Christians have experienced and to which they are witnesses.

This Church doesn't stay there, but is carried away. Because the presence of God always causes a tension. This is why the Eucharist is never finished. We will always say: Come, Lord Jesus (see Rev 22:20). The "Maranatha" will always be the tension of the Eucharist, because it is realizing this Passover: the risen Christ who appears, forms the Church and carries it away towards its fulfillment, sets it in a Passover, sets it moving.

Just as ways were opened through the waters, Jesus, in this context, IS THE WAY THROUGH DEATH THAT GOD HAS OPENED, in his ways can be opened, just as Israel experienced in the Red Sea that the waters opened and that the deserts led somewhere.

I understand that this is very difficult for you. From the answers that this brother has given I see that it must be very difficult for him to place himself into this new dimension. If you have any doubts, we will speak about it later. The Church has changed her perspective enormously in the last twenty years. We will see this much better this evening. I used to think like this brother and I understand him very well. And deep down I believe this is what all of us think, our language being more or less "of resurrection." With a very good theological background

⁴ The paschal character of Jesus' Last Supper is affirmed in the CCC: "By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning." (CCC 1340).

of an old-fashioned sort, he has expressed it better than everyone else: that is how the Church thought 20 years ago.

I invite you all to a voyage of rediscovery, as L. Bouyer says. Don't think that what I am going to tell you now is just off the cuff, here we have entire lives of people who have dedicated their whole life of study and research in order to go back to the sources. The Council only had to gather together this work. In this book I have here (*Eucharist*), Bouyer says that more than thirty years have passed since he set out on this journey to the sources, to the primitive Eucharist and he says that he is still dazzled by the splendors of the treasure he found. He says: "We would discover the Eucharist as a being overflowing with life, but a life of incomparable innerness, depth and unity, even though this life could only be shown through a multiplicity of expressions, as through a harmony or rather a symphony of concerted themes that are gradually orchestrated. The Eucharist presents itself to us like a tree overflowing with life, which branches out in different shapes."

Let us see if we are able to get back to the sources.

Let's sit down at the table with Jesus Christ at the last supper.

The last supper of Jesus Christ is where the first Christian Eucharist is celebrated. Let's see what Jesus Christ does. If we can do this, we are well on the way to discovering how things are. When we discover what the center is, the central treasure that was hidden, all the other elements that surround it will take on their proper importance. Bouyer says that the Eucharist is a treasure that in the primitive Church shone in its entire splendor. With the passing of time we have been putting a series of covers over it, both philosophical and historical, which today cover it up and prevent us from seeing the treasure. History has gradually covered over this treasure. It is not that the Church has lost it. No! It was there, but was well covered over.

What I am going to summarize now is the work of men who dedicated themselves to this. In order to go to the sources many things are needed. To study primitive anaphoras, for example, you need to know Syriac and other ancient languages. To be able to find your way in the maze of the centuries, you need to know the customs and practices of ancient times. Men are needed who may give their entire lives to research.

When Odo Cassel underlined that the Eucharist has a relation with the Passover, he was looked at with suspicion, as if to say: where is this man going? And still today, when the Council says that the Eucharist is a convivium paschale (see SC 47) - "Jesus knowing that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father" (see Jn 13:1) - people are amazed. So the best thing is to sit down with Jesus Christ at the table of the last supper.

The Gospels say: "Jesus took bread and blessed and broke it..." (see Mt 26:26-29) For a long time many exegetes and Biblicists have wanted to know how Jesus Christ gave thanks. Jesus also says: "Do this in memory of me" (see Lk 22:19). What does Jesus Christ mean by "this"?

Some people today think that Jesus was so sad to be going away and leaving those poor guys defenseless that he did a big miracle in this sense: this is my body which will be given up for you; this is my blood which you have because I'm going away. And we believe that the Eucharist is this: something strange and marvelous done by Jesus there and then. (The miracle of the Eucharist is, as we shall see, much more than a disconcerting marvel.)

Other people think, as Luther did, that Christ did nothing extraordinary that night, but because he was full of anguish - for he knew very well that he was going to Gethsemane - he celebrated a supper of friendship with his apostles, full of foreboding and solemnity, an intimate supper for those who were there with him. There are a lot of young priests; for example, (to get to the origins you need more years than they've lived) who think it is that easy and simple. And in opposing clericalisms and ceremonies, they say that things must be made more simple, because the Eucharist is a simple supper, ordinary, secularized, without clericalism: the bread is taken, it is distributed, which is what Jesus Christ did, they drink from the cup and they are all happy and friends; everybody's a brother, everybody's happy... And they say that this is the Eucharist that Jesus celebrated...

Bouyer says: I don't know what would be more dangerous: to leave things as they are with our Roman Canon, well covered up; or to let these people go ahead with their innovations. If we would allow these improvisors to do their things, in a few years we will be left with almost nothing of what Tradition has safeguarded. They believe that Jesus is having a simple friendly supper, with great sentimental overtones. Do you remember those Holy Thursdays, with visits to the sepulchers, which we made full of this sentimental piety about the last supper? It is not like that at all.

Don't think I'm a Jew because of all that I'm going to say. However Jesus Christ was a Jew. Some Jews helped me very much, among them the author of a book, which I hadn't read for eight years, but which I re-read yesterday: *The Hidden Years of Jesus*. I recommend it to you; it's a marvelous book by a Jew, R. Aaron. He says: "No Jew, if he really has the faith of a Jew, can read the New Testament and remain unaffected; if he is truly a Hebrew, he will be absolutely overcome." In the same way a Christian, if he really wants to be renewed, cannot set aside his Jewish roots. True Christian renewal includes a return to its sources, to its roots.

I always say that God's interventions are neither philosophies nor books, but events; it is the Word of God fulfilled. And how do we know that it is the Word of God? Because it is fulfilled. Abraham receives a word that starts him on a journey. Then this Word is fulfilled. And this Word is still in tension, to be fulfilled even further. For Abraham doesn't only have Isaac, but he is father of a people. And this people that possesses a land, waits for an even greater fulfillment as promised in their history. That's to say that God's manifestation has been a history of intertwined events: a

Word, which is a seed that puts out roots and produces fruit from a tree, whose full manifestation is Jesus Christ.

You can't understand Jesus at the last supper without understanding all that comes with him. This is why to understand the Passover that Jesus celebrates, it is necessary to understand also the environment in which this Passover was born and how God revealed it. In fact the Christian Eucharist brings the Jewish Passover to fulfillment, gives it its definitive meaning. "By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to his Father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom." (CCC 1340) In this sense there is something new, an essential difference between the Jewish and the Christian Passovers, like the difference that there is, according to some fathers of the Church, between shadow and reality; but to know the Jewish roots of the Eucharist is fundamental precisely in order to be able to understand this newness of the Christian Eucharist.⁵

We have such legalistic ideas that we misunderstand things. For example, Jesus says: "I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it" (see Mt 5:17). We have such legalistic and moralistic concepts that we think this means that Jesus Christ is so good, so good, that he fulfills all the laws. It means nothing of the sort. For the Jews, the law is not something juridical, but the Torah, the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch). For them, the law is not just legal prescriptions, but fundamentally God's revelation: all the Patriarchs, all of the Exodus, a whole way. It's a way that sets the people free and that - as they know very well - leads them to Sinai, where God's manifestation becomes explicit, where the meaning of all man's history is revealed: which is LOVE. "I AM YOUR GOD AND YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH." That's to say, the Torah is a way. And Jesus Christ says: "I have come to fulfill it," that is, he has come to fulfill this way. That's why St. Paul says: "Christ is our Passover" (see 1 Cor 5:7). Christ is the complete fulfillment of this way, this way that culminates in the Church, because the Church too is on a way. It is the living Christ who

⁵ With regard to this, CCC 1096 states: "Jewish liturgy and Christian liturgy. A better knowledge of the Jewish people's faith and religious life as professed and lived even now can help our better understanding of certain aspects of Christian liturgy ...The relationship between Jewish liturgy and Christian liturgy, but also their differences in content, are particularly evident in the great feasts of the liturgical year, such as Passover. Christians and Jews both celebrate the Passover. For Jews, it is the Passover of history, tending toward the future; for Christians, it is the Passover fulfilled in the death and Resurrection of Christ, though always in expectation of its definitive consummation."

has set the Church on the way because he opened the way and is dragging mankind behind him, symbolized in the Church that walks along this way to pull, in its turn, the nations towards the Father. So these events, these interventions of God, cause eternity to burst into history and get Israel to celebrate these events in such a way that they are made present for them.

The Exodus is where the people of Israel are born, because the people of God are created out of the waters of the Red Sea. It is called together and made by God, just as the Church is called together and created by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God is not only a God of the past events. He is a God of the present, continuing in history. He is the Eternal One. That's why for Israel the Exodus is a Word present and acting in their history. And the way of perpetuating this intervention of God is the Passover. I have said already that the first thing that happens is always the living experience, not the writings. The first thing we find in Israel is a response to this liberation by God, which is the Passover, the feast, that wasn't invented by Israel, Jesus Christ doesn't invent the Eucharist. Like all peoples, Israel celebrated the feast of spring. But one day, for Israel, the Exodus, this intervention of God, becomes much more important than the coming of spring. And so, this feast that has always been celebrated will change content. It will be the feast of the Exodus, the feast of liberation. In this feast of the spring they now celebrate the Exodus. Let's see how.

"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you" says Jesus (see Lk 22:15). "The hour has come to pass from this world to the Father... My hour has come... For this have I come" (see Jn 12:23; 13:1; 18:37).

To know what Jesus Christ does (as we've said before, it's no caricature, no friendly dinner because he's leaving) we'll see what is this Passover for Jesus Christ, who is a Jew, what it is for Israel. For this is what Jesus Christ is celebrating on this night, with the essential differences that we will see.

For Israel, the Passover is God present in his saving action. It is a sacrament that makes God present on this night. It is Israel's greatest feast. You know that Israel celebrates this festival not only with a religious, but also a political, sense for it is the anniversary of Israel's birth.

In the Jewish Passover, God is present acting in the whole of history, in an analogous way to the presence of Jesus Christ for us in the Eucharist: Jesus Christ alive, the fullness of all the history of salvation, is really present in the Eucharist. On this night Yahweh is absolutely present to free all those around the table who are in slavery. God is present on this night. So, Jesus Christ is not taking part in any supper but in the greatest liturgy of the people of Israel. It is a night totally and absolutely sacred, a sacramental night.

On the table the covenant, the "Berith," appears through signs that we shall see. On the table is present the whole history of Israel. We are before a sacrament, the sacrament of the Passover for Israel. And this God who intervened then, is

once more present, it is not a simple memory. IT IS A MEMORIAL THAT MAKES GOD REALLY PRESENT in his saving action.

Jesus says: "My hour has come." So let's see what Jesus and his disciples do at that supper.⁶

The people of Israel itself had seen many developments in its liturgy, because its God is not a static God. The Passover that Jesus Christ celebrated is not the same as the one Moses celebrated on the day of their delivery from Egypt because by now Israel had had a long history. God doesn't intervene in order to destroy. Starting off from its feasts and sacrifices, this people has been led by God through a great evolution to the point of putting at the center of all its spirituality this feast of the Passover, celebrated in the family. At the time of Jesus Christ the temple is no longer the center of the liturgy but this family liturgy of the night of the Passover. They have been in exile and have purified their rites. And the "Paschal

⁶ On the prefiguration of the Eucharist in the history of salvation and on the institution of the Eucharist at the last supper, refer to CCC 1333-1340:

CCC 1333: At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood. Faithful to the Lord's command the Church continues to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did on the eve of his Passion: "He took bread..." "He took the cup filled with wine..." The signs of bread and wine become, in a way surpassing understanding, the Body and Blood of Christ; they continue also to signify the goodness of creation.

CCC 1334: In the Old Covenant bread and wine were offered in sacrifice among the first fruits of the earth, as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to the Creator. But they also received a new significance in the context of the Exodus: the unleavened bread that Israel eats every year at Passover commemorates the haste of the departure that liberated them from Egypt; the remembrance of the manna in the desert will always recall to Israel that it lives by the bread of the Word of God (see Dt 8:3); their daily bread is the fruit of the promised land, the pledge of God's faithfulness to his promises. The "cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10:16) at the end of the Jewish Passover meal adds to the festive joy of wine an eschatological dimension: the messianic expectation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. When Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he gave a new and definitive meaning to the blessing of the bread and the cup.

CCC 1337: The Lord, having loved those who were his own, loved them to the end. Knowing that the hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father, in the course of a meal he washed their feet and gave them the commandment of love (see Jn 13:1-17). In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, he instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and Resurrection and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; "thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament" (Council of Trent).

Seder,"⁷ which I'm going to tell you about, is the heart of the Jewish Passover. At the time of Christ, which is the time that interests us, this liturgy is celebrated in the family. For Exodus says clearly: "God spared our houses" (Ex 12:27).

On the fourteenth night of Nisan, the night in which the full moon saw Israel leave Egypt, on the first day of the year, all the Jewish families gather. It is the center of the year. This is where history begins. On this night the families who have gathered together will celebrate the greatest of all liturgies in which God will make himself present through this "Paschal Seder."

Jesus says to Peter and John: Go and prepare what is needed for the feast" (see Lk 22:8). Because this feast needs a most careful preparation. It's so important that it is prepared well in advance. The woman of the house cleans the whole house scrupulously. And already in the evening the liturgy begins.

Passover is the Sacrament of the Exodus. That is Yahweh's powerful arm that pulled Israel out of Egypt has not shortened today, it is not shorter today in order to save. It is present and actual. Tonight God carries out the same salvation that he carried out in Egypt. To understand this, we need to explain of the word MEMORIAL,⁸ because this is the Passover : the memorial of the Exodus (see Ex 12:14).

The word memorial sums up what for us is "sacrament." A sacrament contains within it a reality that is made real and becomes present. In our translations the word memorial tends to mean "remembrance," a "memory" of the past. But that's not what it is. A memorial is a sacrament, something that happens, an event that takes place, a present efficacy. The Passover is a sacrament, a fact, an event that is realized. That's why it comes to be realized within each one present.

During the exile Israel is left without a temple. The prophets call the people together with a powerful voice, with a living Word that makes God present in Israel's history as an event. There's no longer any worship of a pagan kind.

The Passover is a great feast. Wine will flow freely during the night. It's a great exultation, a great sacrament, a great liturgy. So those priests are completely wrong who, in trying to secularize it, think that it's just a matter of eating the bread and drinking at the chalice together and nothing more. It is a great liturgy in which Jesus Christ really will officiate as a great liturgist, in which he will not invent the rite. Cardinal Schuster says that Jesus seems to have the ritual of the cross already written; everything that he said on that night was already written (Psalm 21, for example, etc.). Neither Jesus

⁷ Even if it is not completely certain that at the time of Jesus the ritual of the Jewish Passover would follow precisely the order of any of the four "Seder" that we know today, it is nevertheless true that the fundamental structure and essential elements were the same.

⁸ On the Eucharist as memorial of Christ: CCC 1341-1344.

Christ invents anything during the supper. The only thing he will do is to make Passover; to bring it to fulfillment.

As I said, this feast is prepared with great care. It is the center of the life of Israel.

The first thing they do is to look for the "hametz." They have to get rid of all the old bread in the house, symbolizing everything that is old. So the head of the house performs a rite: he goes from room to room with a lit candle, searching out all the old bread, saying a blessing to God and burns it all. He says:

Lord, if there is something hidden in me which I haven't yet found or which I don't know about, make it disappear from within me.

Jesus Christ condemned the Pharisees not because they carry out their rites, but because they do so without content. When this happens the rite is turned into pharasaism. It isn't that Jesus Christ did not carry out the rites. Quite the opposite. This rite is so important, for example, that St. Paul mentions it: "Remove from yourselves the yeast of the Pharisees... the old yeast... celebrate the festival with the unleavened bread of sincerity..." (see 1 Cor 5:6-8; Lk 12:1-2).

All the things that are done are full of the experience that Israel has of the Passover, which begins by getting rid of everything that is old. The old has gone, Passover begins: God passes, bringing behind him the whole of creation.

So what do Peter and John prepare? All the things needed for the celebration of Passover, above all the signs, which perhaps will seem a bit strange to you, but which for Israel are real sacramental signs.

They put bitter herbs on a plate; they make unleavened bread; in a glass they put water with salt and vinegar; a hard-boiled egg; the lamb (at the time of Jesus Christ there was maybe only a bone, as a symbol); and the "haroset," a paste made from crushed bitter almonds, mixed with apple and cinnamon. This paste has a reddish color and is meant to signify the clay with which they mixed the bricks in Egypt.

All these are signs for Israel. A Hebrew only has to sit at table in front of these signs to see the Exodus present, a living God who marks out history. We'll explain these things better later on.

This night is a great feast. We have got hold of the idea that it was a sad supper, also because of Gethsemane that follows. This is not true. We are in front of the greatest explosion of happiness for Israel: the feast of their liberation.

The feast is divided into three parts. The first is centered on the unleavened bread.

The first part of the feast: THE RITE OF THE BREAD.

This first Part begins with a cup of wine: the "kaddesh." In this rite there is a great blessing to God: the "kiddush."

This first cup begins the night and inaugurates the feast. The head of the family, who presides, raises the cup and says:

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, eternal King, who chose us from among all the peoples to sanctify us with your commandments, out of love for us. Lord, you gave us feasts for our pleasure, solemnities for happiness, the feast of the unleavened bread, time of our liberation, you gave us in perpetual memorial of our delivery from Egypt.

Remember that God is at the center of all Israel's blessings. We have been influenced by a humanistic education in which man is at the center and we ask God to bless all our things. All our blessings are directed downward. We say: bless, Lord, this food that we are going to eat. We put God at our service. But as you will see, all the blessings of this night are directed upward: God is the center. Man takes occasion of whatever he sees - the bread, the wine, etc. - to raise his eyes to God and bless him. The center of the blessing and exultation is God.

Secondly, just think that they say: this feast is a perpetual memorial of our escape from Egypt. Remember that Yahweh says: this will be a memorial before your eyes, you will have it engraved on your hands, it will be a memorial for ever and you will celebrate it from generation to generation (see Ex 12:14).

In other words this Passover feast makes present God's intervention in history. This Passover is the sacrament that sums up the presence of God in Israel.

This first cup is called the "Cup of Sanctification" because it glorifies God for the feast.

This has such a strong connection with eschatology that Jesus Christ, when he does this blessing of the first cup at the Passover supper, says: "I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes" (see Lk 22:18). And earlier he had said: "I shall not eat of this Passover until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (see Lk 22:16). We, who have lost the Jewish Paschal meaning of the Eucharist, don't understand this first cup that appears in the gospel of St. Luke (see 22:17-18). This was a big problem for the exegetes, already very far from the sources, because they didn't understand why there was this cup; it worried them because they didn't know how to explain it. This is so true that this first cup disappeared from some manuscripts. Instead, Jesus Christ, before drinking this cup, refers to eternal rest, to sanctification and to the feast. Eternal rest, which is sacred in Israel and of which the "Shabbat" is a memorial, is expressed in this cup as an inauguration. But Jesus doesn't "consecrate", as we would say, this cup. The feast of Passover is an anticipation of eternity, so this cup that inaugurates the feast has this eschatological sense which is present perfectly in Jesus and which St. Luke takes up.

After this first cup, the rite of the night begins. Don't think that this liturgy lasts an hour and a half like our masses. It's a whole night of watching. Because Yahweh is

passing, so "you shall be in watch, in vigil, all night long" (see Ex 12:42).

Do you know why they can keep vigil all night long? Because they have experienced, they have lived the manifestation of God that has left them waiting for a greater manifestation. He who waits, does so because he has an "axis," a guarantee, so he can spend a whole night in vigil. He who lacks this, has nothing to wait for. That's why the feast has this sense of waiting and vigil.

The feast begins at sunset and lasts until the morning star appears, all the time in waiting.

Now a rite will begin which will make present the liberation. Liberation from what? From the slavery of Egypt. So they make the slavery present.

The head of the family takes a piece of celery about the size of an olive, dips it into the salt and vinegar and gives it to each one to eat. The bitter herbs are a sacrament of the situation of slavery, of bitterness. The slavery of Egypt appears in the foreground. Everyone eats his herbs saying a short prayer. They do nothing without blessing God because they're in a liturgy.

After this the head of the house then does a washing of the hands.

I won't tell you everything because it would take too long. I will just tell you what is essential, that is what passes into our Eucharist.

All the part that comes now is centered on the unleavened bread. Whoever is presiding now lifts up the bread and says:

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who hunger let them come and eat. All who are slaves let them come and celebrate the Passover. Now we are here, next year we shall be in Jerusalem, we shall be free men.

In this night they pass from the old year to the new, from the slavery of the old year to the freedom of the new year. It is truly a passage, a Passover, what they are doing.

With this elevation of the bread, the "Haggadah" will begin, the narration of all that God has done for Israel. Because Yahweh says: "On that day you will tell your son what the Lord has done for you" (cf. Ex 12:26-27; 10:2).

Israel is a people born different from all the other peoples for it has been elected for a mission: to reveal the existence of God to the nations. The first commandment they have is to pass on the faith from generation to generation (see Dt 6:7). This duty of transmission is liturgically carried out in this night through the "Haggadah." The purpose of this night is to pass faith from one generation to another. We'll see how this very human and family supper is a transmission of faith from generation to generation, from fathers to sons, total unity among those present and at the same time is a sacred supper: God is present.

So with this elevation of the bread begins the telling of the story aimed to the children. The whys begin. This whole part of the "Passover Seder" wouldn't be understood if the children weren't present. It is an essential part. All the signs are so that the children will ask questions. Because the children, seeing all these strange things, ask: why in this night are we eating these herbs that we never eat? Why in this night do we eat this bread and not the kind we usually eat?

The Jews say that what has kept the feast forever young is the presence of the children, this work of transmission, the spontaneity and candor of the "Haggadah." These questions that at first seem so naive because the children ask them, in fact have an incredible power. For the "Haggadah" isn't a simple narration of the past, but is always done in the questioning sense of why?

The Jews say that it isn't that they go to the night of Egypt, but it is the night who comes, to ask us "where we are." This is so powerful for the Jews, that those who collaborated with the Nazis in the concentration camps had only to hear the songs of Passover night to hear the question: are you among the oppressed or the oppressors? For Yahweh passes in order to free the former and destroy the latter. This is fundamental in the Jewish conscience. This night the awakens in every Jew his Jewish being.

The children ask:

Why does this night differ from all other nights? We don't eat herbs with water on all other nights. Why do we have them tonight? On all other nights we have ordinary bread. Why this bread tonight? On all other nights we have vegetables. Why these bitter herbs tonight?

And the one who is presiding answers:

We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt and the Lord our God brought us out thereof with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Now, had not Holy One, blessed be his name, brought out our fathers from Egypt, then we and our children and our children's children would be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Wherefore, even were we all wise men, all men of understanding, all advanced in years, all men with knowledge of the Torah, it would yet be, our duty and our greatest joy to recount today the Exodus from Egypt.

This means that even if we knew it all by heart, we would still spend the whole night telling about the coming forth from Egypt.

And he gives an example:

The sages Rabbi Eleazer, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Azariah, when their disciples went one morning to sing the morning liturgy, (the Shema) told them (they were still there after having spent all night together): Now we've understood what the Torah says: "You shall remember the day of the delivery from Egypt all the days of your life. The Torah doesn't say "the days of your life" but

"all the days," which means "with the whole night included."

So they realized that the Torah said the whole night.

It isn't a question of knowledge but a sacramental question. Because when the story is told God makes himself present and acts. This is the efficacy of the sacrament. So this night is real and efficacious.

The aforementioned passage is a midrashic account of Deuteronomy 6:21 done by the father of the family.

The children are divided into four groups, according to the way they're going to ask questions. There's the intelligent child who asks:

What mean all the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God has given us? Then you will answer him.

Then there's the foolish child, the simple-minded child and the one who doesn't even know how to ask a question. The wise one says, "that God has given to us," that is, he includes himself, but the stupid one says: "What's this rite that you're doing," not including himself.

By excluding himself from the community, he destroys the basic principle of Judaism. Therefore answer him in the same way: "This is what God did for me, taking me out of Egypt." What he did for me not for you. "For if you had been there, God wouldn't have taken you out of Egypt." As for the child who doesn't know how to ask questions, you initiate him, as it is written: "Thus instruct your child: we do this because God acted for us, taking us out of Egypt."

I'm telling you this so you can see something of the pedagogy of the night.

Now the narration of the story begins:

From the beginning our fathers were worshippers of strange gods.

It starts by explaining how Abraham, their father, was a polytheist.

But I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood and led him throughout all the land of Canaan.

The midrashic narrative begins in this way. In a marvelous narrative form in the style of oriental stories, it makes history present in a way that is close to a child's mentality. It could seem like a legend, but it's full of history and truth.

They begin with the promise. Whenever they speak of the promise they cover the bread and uncover the cup of wine. For the bread signifies slavery and the wine freedom. Through these signs, gestures and actions and through the Word, the parents

are transmitting faith to the children, through this sacrament. They say:

Blessed be he who keeps his pledge to Israel. It is this divine pledge that has stood by our fathers and by us also. Not only one man has risen against us to destroy us, but in every generation have men risen against us to destroy us: but the Holy One, blessed be he, delivered us from their hand. Go and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to Jacob our father. For Pharaoh issued his decree only concerning the males, but Laban wished to destroy all, as it is said (Dt 26:5) "An Aramaean oppressed my father and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there with a few; and became there a nation, great, mighty and populous.

This is the text that the father is going to explain to his son and so he begins word for word: "He went down to Egypt and lived there." He then paraphrases it all. "With a few"... "Became a great nation"... "Numerous"... etc. Then he goes on:

The Egyptians evil entreated us and afflicted us and laid upon us hard servitude.

And so it goes on, point by point. Imagine the tension with which everything must be told to keep the child awake all night.

And we cried out to the Lord God of our fathers and the Lord heard our voice.

Beautiful songs for the children accompany all this.

And the Lord looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders. And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt; not by the hand of an Angel and not by the hand of a Seraph and not by the hand of a Messenger, but the Holy one, blessed be he, in his glorious Person, as it is said " For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord."

Imagine the emphasis when it says: "I shall pass through the land of Egypt that night, I and not an angel, I and not a seraphim, I and none other; I AM THE LORD."

Then comes the "DAYENU."

In order for it to be quite clear that it's something present and happening now, it says:

If he had delivered us from Egypt, without leading us to Sinai it would have been enough.

And they all say: really "dayenu" (it would have been enough).

And if he had led us through the desert, without giving us the quails it would have been enough

And so, in a liturgical form and giving emphasis to each step of the way, they recall the Exodus, making it present. The children receive the Scriptures from the living voice, they hear it from their parents before reading it, because they are not writings but life and cannot be transmitted in writing but by the living voice, from the life.

This supper truly proclaims what is written. The children receive the faith from the father who has it. The father, having brought the history of God's revelation to life by his faith and experience, then says:

It is truly great, what God has done with us.

He then, before continuing, explains what will be done. Nothing is done without an explanation, so even the children know what's being done and why. He explains the reason for the signs. For these signs, these sacraments, have a content, they're frames with something inside. We, so rational, prefer reasoning to signs, but the sign, as anthropology and psychology are discovering today, (we are moving away from a rationalist epoch) goes far beyond the reason. It speaks to the imagination and the total being. The transmission of things that are important is done by signs and not by reasoning.

The bread, which for the pagan religions signified the first ear of the spring, new bread, unleavened bread, that doesn't contain old leaven, nothing of the leaven of the past, now takes on a fuller content. Like all peoples, Israel celebrated the spring festival: the passage from the death of winter to the life of spring. But Israel has a much more powerful experience of this - the coming forth from Egypt, the passing from slavery to freedom. So for Israel the bread no longer means life blossoming into spring, but the Coming forth from Egypt. This unleavened bread is sacrament and sign of the coming out of Egypt. This is why the father answers the son who asks him: "Why this bread tonight?" by explaining: "It is unleavened because of haste, because God told us to leave quickly and didn't give us time to make it rise." It's the bread of haste, the bread of affliction, the bread of slavery, the bread of misery. So that the bread has taken on a new content.

After having explained the content of each sign, the father then says something that will become an integral part of our Mass, constituting the essence of the Preface. It basically sums up the meaning of the Eucharist, the Passover that they are celebrating:

In each and every generation it is a man's duty to consider himself as if he had come forth from Misraim (Egypt), for it is said: and you shall tell of that day to your son: In the sight of all, Adonai acted for me when I came out of Egypt.

In me and I.

Not our fathers only did the Holy One, blessed be he, redeem, but us also, he redeemed with them, as it is said:

"And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers." Wherefore it is our duty TO THANK, TO PRAISE, TO LAUD, TO GLORIFY, TO EXALT, TO COMMEND, TO BLESS, TO EXTOL and TO ACCLAIM HIM WHO PERFORMED ALL THESE MIRACOLOUS DEEDS FOR OUR FATHERS AND FOR US. HE BROUGHT US FORTH FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM, FROM ANGUISH TO JOY, FROM DARKNESS TO GREAT LIGHT, FROM SERVITUDE TO REDEMPTION. LET US THEREFORE SING BEFORE HIM A NEW SONG: PRAISE YE THE LORD.

Then they intone the ALLELUIA (Psalm 112) that is a hymn of glorification, of exultation for the Passover, for passing from one situation to another. It is marvelous to see this, which is a sacrament, sung by the Hebrews even if they are in a concentration camp. They say: the breach that the Exodus opened in history for the freeing of the oppressed by now cannot be closed. And in the midst of oppression they will raise the cup of liberation, affirming that liberty exists and that history is on the way to freedom, on the way out of slavery, that God has made a way of liberation for humanity.

Then they sing another Alleluia, Psalm 113: Praise the Eternal One. When Israel went forth from Egypt, etc., then Psalm 114: What ails you Jordan, that you turn back? The mountains skip like lambs, it is Yahweh who passes etc. All these psalms are compositions for the night of the Passover.

Now there's a second washing of hands.

This is where we can place Jesus' washing of the feet. It is always done by the youngest of the house. Here the problem arises among the apostles as to who among them, should do this service. And so it is Jesus Christ who does it, but washing the feet.

Moreover, the whole rite of the celebration is in a context of interventions and prayers to be said, all very precisely laid down. That's why all the sermon of the last supper as presented by St. John fits very well into the context of this part of the "Haggadah" (Jn 13:21-17, 26). All of this sermon fits perfectly into the context of the paschal celebration.

After this washing of hands comes the part that is most interesting to us. We've seen that the first part of the rite revolves around the bread.

When this point of the celebration arrives, the one who is presiding takes the bread, gives thanks to God saying:

Blessed are you, Lord, eternal King, who brought bread forth from the earth.

He then breaks it and gives it to eat to each of the participants. To partake of this bread is to be in communion with the slavery of Egypt and the deliverance from Egypt. Just think how easy it was for Jesus Christ, arrived at this moment in the rite, to say:

"THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS GIVEN FOR YOU; DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME" (Lk 22:19).

It is as though he is saying: THIS WILL NO LONGER BE FOR YOU THE BREAD OF THE COMING FORTH FROM EGYPT: THIS IS MY MEMORIAL. MY LEAVING THIS WORLD TO GO TO MY FATHER. THIS IS MY BODY HANDED OVER TO DEATH FOR YOU.

That is, to partake with this bread will no longer mean to be in communion with the slavery of Egypt, it's no longer a memorial of the the coming forth from Egypt. TO PARTAKE WITH THIS BREAD WILL BE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE BODY OF JESUS CHRIST WHO HANDS HIMSELF OVER TO DEATH. THIS BREAD IS REALLY HIS BODY HANDED OVER TO DEATH. It isn't the bread of misery which our fathers ate in the desert. It's the death of the Son of Man, it's his flesh. THE BREAD IS NOW SACRAMENT AND MEMORIAL OF THE BODY OF JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus says: This will be my memorial.

"This," what is it? Not just these few words, but all that is happening during the night, that is, this Passover, this supper that you hold as a memorial of the coming forth from Egypt will no longer be the memorial of the coming forth from Egypt, will be my memorial. This celebration, with the prayer and all the new rite done by Jesus Christ over the bread and wine, with his words and his gestures, is the memorial of his Passover.

We put the emphasis on the words "Do this"; that is, that the apostles may remember to repeat it. If Jesus Christ had been showing the Apostles a completely new rite, in the situation they were in, they would have remembered nothing. The emphasis is on doing this "as my memorial." That is, this that you will always do (to celebrate Passover) because you are Jews, for you it will no longer be the memorial of the coming forth from Egypt; this, with all my words and all my gestures, is my memorial. The following year the apostles, if Christ hadn't told them anything, would have carried on celebrating the Passover and the same in the years to come .

It's important to understand this. Jesus Christ says: "My hour has come, the hour of passing from this world to my Father; I have greatly desired to celebrate this Passover with you; for this have I come." Jesus Christ has come to realize this passage from death to resurrection. Therefore his hour has come. And he leaves us a memorial of this deed he is going to do. This liturgy, this Passover, is the memorial of the passing from death to resurrection; the making present of the victory over death. This liturgy is the sacrament of the passage of Jesus Christ from death to resurrection.

Just think that this bread was already an object of celebration among the pagan peoples, as the bread of the first fruits, at the arrival of spring.

For Israel this bread acquires a new content, a new meaning: the coming forth from Egypt.

And Jesus gives it yet another meaning, gives a new content to the sign: this bread is my body that will be handed over to death for you. Jesus didn't invent the sign that was very ancient. He gives the sign fullness, a new meaning, a new content. For he fulfills the Passover, he fulfills the passage from the slavery of death to the promised land, which is to

reach the Father, happiness, the new Jerusalem. Jesus Christ brings the Torah to fulfillment, he has fulfilled the way, he has fulfilled the Passover. That's how St. Paul understood it when he said: Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed.

With this bread eaten by the participants, the first part of the Passover celebration comes to an end.

Second Part: A GREAT DINNER

Now, in the middle of the celebration, comes a great dinner. We're at a great feast. Night is drawing on. They began fasting. They didn't eat anything the day before, so as to truly be hungry in this liturgy and to eat the bread of the misery of slavery with eagerness. They now pass, with this dinner, from a situation of sadness and darkness to a sacramental situation of great joy. This feast mounts to a crescendo. It's a feast that moves to a climax. The dinner is really abundant, much bigger than our Christmas dinner, for example.

Third part: THE CUP OF BLESSING

After this great dinner comes the third part which is also a rite. It centers on a cup. During the dinner the wine has flowed freely. But now there is a cup different from all the others. It is the cup of blessing of which St. Paul speaks when he says, quoting the psalm: "How shall I give thanks to the Lord? I shall take the cup of blessing and bless your name." (see 1 Cor 10:16; Ps 116:13) This cup of blessing is the climax of the whole night.

After the big dinner, the person who is presiding stands up and invites the whole family to stand. He says:

With your permission, I shall give thanks.

And they all stand up. Our "Sursum Corda" has its roots here.

The one who is presiding raises the cup and begins a great "Beraka," a great Eucharist, a great exultation, in which he confesses and proclaims all the events of salvation. This is fundamentally a "Eucharist." It's the summary of all our anaphoras; a recounting of our salvation, proclaimed and confessed.

Remember that the Roman Canon said:

Taking the chalice, he blessed it and said...

In the Middle Ages, with so many genuflections and signs of the cross, they didn't say any longer that Jesus had blessed God but that he had blessed the chalice. (We had misunderstood and impoverished everything: all the blessings were from God to us.) The revised text says:

He took the chalice and giving thanks, he blessed it and gave it to his disciples saying...

All this corresponds to this third part of the Passover liturgy. For Jesus Christ does what the president does: takes the cup, raises it and says:

Blessed are you Lord, our God, King of the universe, who feeds the whole world with your goodness, grace and mercy, who feeds all flesh, for you feed and sustain all living creatures...

And so, beginning with the smallest thing, he recounts the whole of salvation until he gets to what is most important:

We give you thanks above all for the Covenant that you made in our own flesh...

So you see how easy it was for Jesus to say here:

"THIS CUP THAT IS Poured OUT FOR YOU IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD" (Lk 22:20).

It is as though he were saying: THIS WILL NO LONGER BE A MEMORIAL AND SACRAMENT OF THE OLD COVENANT OF SINAI. THIS IS A MEMORIAL OF THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD, WHICH WILL BE SHED FOR YOU.

Again a change in the content of the sign: now this is a memorial and sacrament of the covenant of Jesus Christ in his blood, of the union of the divine with humanity that Jesus Christ has made; of the work that the Father has done in Jesus Christ, resurrecting him from the dead, raising his body from death.

Do you understand now what Jesus Christ did at the last supper? In this Passover that celebrates the passage from slavery to freedom, there is a change of content: this Passover is a memorial of Christ's passage from death to resurrection. THIS PASSOVER IS MY PASSOVER, Jesus says, MY PASSAGE FROM DEATH TO LIFE. He leaves us the Passover celebration as a memorial of what he came to do: pass from this world to the Father. He leaves us a sacrament; a memorial, which is a feast, a Eucharist, an exultation for what the Father has done in Christ for us. HE HAS LEFT US A LIVING SACRAMENT IN WHICH WE PASS FROM DEATH TO RESURRECTION, FOR IN THIS FEAST OF EXULTATION, RESURRECTION FROM DEATH IS EXPERIENCED. THIS LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT, WHICH CALLED THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH TOGETHER, HAS CAUSED IT TO MAKE EUCHARIST, A PROCLAMATION, BECAUSE IT HAS RECEIVED THE SPIRIT OF RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. THIS IS WHY THE CHURCH FUNDAMENTALLY PROCLAIMS THE RESURRECTION IN THE EUCHARIST. THE EUCHARIST IS A PROCLAMATION, A KERYGMA OF THE SACRAMENTAL, OBJECTIVE, PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST RISEN FROM DEATH.

Do you see why in the questionnaire you were asked: Where is the resurrection in the Mass?

The whole Eucharist is a glorious song of Jesus Christ's resurrection. It is a Passover, the Sacrament of the passage from death to Resurrection. Sacraments are not allegorical signs. It's a perennial and effective sacrament in which the Spirit acts and raises up the dead who participate and eat of this bread and drink of this chalice. HE WHO EATS MY BODY AND

DRINKS MY BLOOD WILL HAVE LIFE IN HIM, says Jesus. WHENEVER YOU EAT THIS BREAD AND DRINK THIS CHALICE YOU ANNOUNCE MY DEATH UNTIL I COME (1 Cor 11:26).

One last thing: on this night, a night full of expectation, the Jews are waiting for the Messiah. It is on this night that the messianism of Israel, the hope they had of a liberator, can be seen. So much so, that they leave the door open so the Messiah can come in, with an empty place and a cup and plate at the table.

I remember that when we explained this at one of the earliest catecheses we did in Spain, there was a Jew there who was a convert. After listening to all I'd said, he said: "Just think of all they told me about the Eucharist. Let me say something." And he went on: "I've lived all this for years without realizing it had any connection with the Eucharist my wife spoke about. I really believed in Christ, but he had been presented to me in a different light." He said: "Of course the Hebrews can hope for liberation because they've already experienced it. On that night the past mixes with the present and the future, because one is entering the eternity of God in which there is no time." When he was little, this Jew said, he used to keep an eye fixed on the open door to see if someone would appear.

This sense of waiting is fundamental. The meaning of all the parables which speak of waiting, like the one of the wise and foolish virgins which we've moralized, is to have our loins girded in expectation, a wonderful expectation, because there is a guarantee for the waiting. To hope is the most wonderful thing in the world. It is a horrible thing to have no hope, to hope for nothing more. The tension of life creates hope.

In this feast the past is being lived and the waiting and the hoping are real, all symbolized in the door being left open.

The same Jew went on: "So did Christ close the door, once he, the Messiah, had arrived?" Without thinking I said yes, but later realized that it's not like that. At the Eucharist we've got the door open, because Christ's coming, which in the Eucharist is being celebrated and realized, is the biggest guarantee there is with which to hope for his second coming.⁹ So the summing up after the consecration is perfect:

WE ANNOUNCE YOUR DEATH, WE PROCLAIM YOUR RESURRECTION, COME LORD JESUS!

The Church is in tension, waiting to be taken to heaven. Jesus Christ, who is no mere literary character, even less a

⁹ On the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist, refer to CCC 1402-1405:

CCC 1419: Having passed from this world to the Father, Christ gives us in the Eucharist the pledge of glory with him. Participation in the Holy Sacrifice identifies us with his Heart, sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints.

theory, but a living Word, an event, a reality, a person who fulfills many things and, above all, the resurrection from the dead. He stays living in the hearts of the apostles. The first thing they do is not to write things down. The first experience of the primitive Church is an exultation for what has happened, a living confession that appears as liturgy, just as in Israel the Passover was an exultant confession of the events of their salvation.

All this that is life, not writing, will later be summarized in the Gospels, which are collections of the catechesis. But before the written Gospels there was something else: the primitive liturgy of the Church. So not everything was written down, but it was lived. To discover this is to discover a volcano. Getting back to the sources is dazzling.

The scriptures don't contain everything. (We're not Protestants.) There's also a living Tradition. For God is reality, living, not something written. All these events have been lived before being written about. The apostles transmit to us what is life in them by living it.

It is the same thing with our Eucharists; missals appear very late. The Eucharist was transmitted alive from generation to generation.

In order to know what the Eucharist is it's not enough to know what the gospels say. They recount only the new things that Jesus Christ introduced into the Passover, what for them was new, the new words he used when he gave a new content to the Passover celebration. They don't give an account of what people already knew. It's just as if you wrote to your mother and you said: "Then we said the rosary." You wouldn't explain to her that first you said the first mystery, the Our Father, then ten Hail Marys and then the Glory Be. You don't tell her all this because she already knows what the rosary is. So you'd only mention anything new you did on that occasion. You've got to see things in the environment they were born in, where they were experienced.

(Kiko)

I just want to add one thing. In Exodus there is a whole series of events that God did with the people of Israel: taking them from the slavery of Egypt; leading them to the sea; opening the waters to let them pass and burying in the waves all their enemies who followed in pursuit; leading them across the desert in the form of a cloud; giving them manna, quails, water; freeing them from the snakes; giving them the law; conquering seven nations and giving them possession of the promised land.

In this long way that is the Exodus, there is a series of deaths: slavery, the sea, lack of bread, of water, of meat, the desert, the seven nations, etc. ALL THESE DEATHS ARE BROKEN AND OPENED BY GOD. GOD OPENS WAYS THROUGH DEATH AND FROM THAT SAME DEATH TAKES OUT LIFE.

All these events are a Word of God. When the night of the 14th of Nisan arrives, the night on which they escaped from Egypt, the night on which their history begins, why does Israel

gather in memorial all night long? BECAUSE JUST AS ON THAT NIGHT GOD WAS WATCHING TO BRING HIS PEOPLE OUT OF EGYPT, TONIGHT TOO HE IS KEEPING VIGIL TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE. That's why Exodus says: On that night you will not sleep, you will watch because that night is a PERPETUAL MEMORIAL. ON THAT NIGHT I SHALL PASS AMONG MY PEOPLE. That's why the Hebrews expect the Messiah to come on that night.

And on that night when all the people were gathered thinking, "Will it be tonight?" the Messiah arrived and no one noticed. The Jews celebrated their Passover and that night all the prophecies were fulfilled, without anybody realizing it. ON THAT NIGHT THE STRONG ARM OF YAHWEH WAS EXTENDED TO SAVE JESUS FROM THE DEAD. THE SAME ARM THAT HAD BEEN STRETCHED OUT THROUGHOUT THEIR HISTORY TO SAVE THEM, GAVE LIFE AND RESURRECTION TO A DEAD MAN, PUTTING HUMAN NATURE INTO THE DIVINITY. ALL SINS WERE PARDONED THAT NIGHT and IN HIM HUMANITY HAD ACCESS TO ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The Passover celebrates, proclaims and confesses the Exodus in a great feast. It is the passing from slavery to freedom; from death to life; from darkness, in which man lives when he is oppressed and his rights despised, when he is tortured, embittered because he doesn't know the meaning of life; from this darkness to light. This Passover is a memorial for all eternity of the passage of God that saves his people.

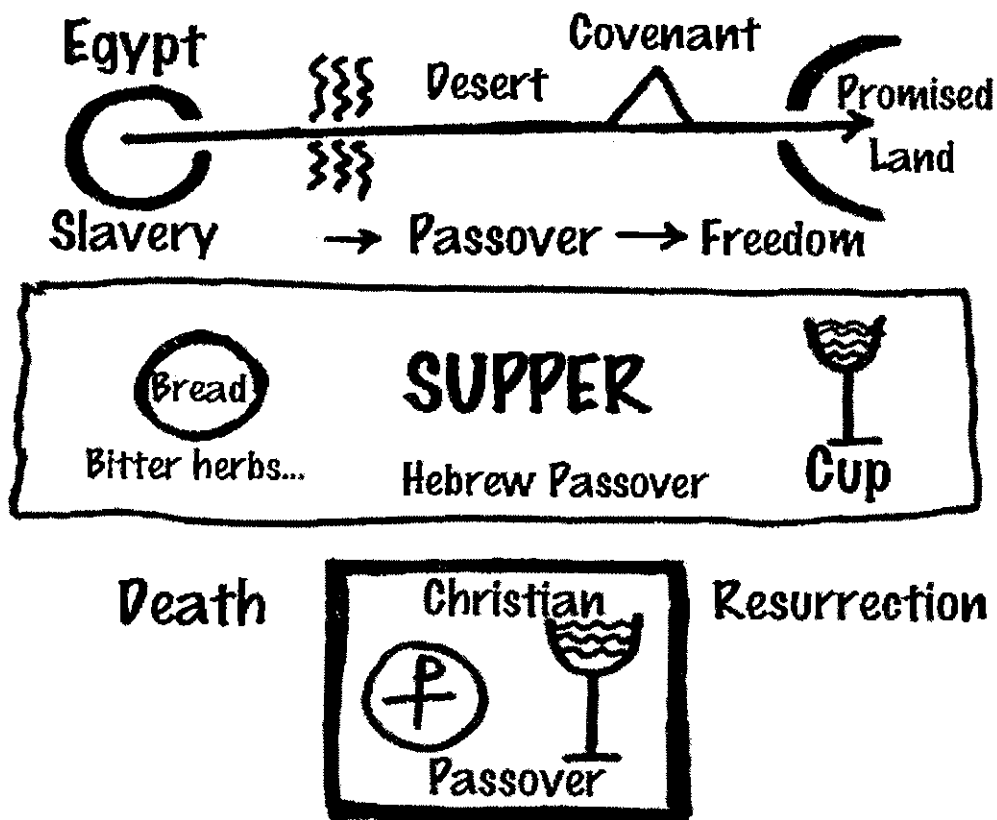
This word Exodus, what does it mean? This word searches among the participants for the one who wants to fulfill it. What does this Word say fundamentally? THAT GOD IS LOVE. These bitter herbs, these crushed almonds - which signify the bricks they made in slavery - this unleavened bread, all these signs are making present the marvels that God did: how he took them from Egypt, opened the sea, the desert, gave them the manna, the quails, the water, the law, the promised land. The head of the house says to those taking part: If there's someone here tonight who is bitter, destroyed, because he doesn't get on with his wife, because he doesn't accept himself, because things are not going well, because he's neurotic, because he doesn't earn enough, because of whatever, let him come and make this Passover with us, let him pass with us to freedom.

What will make him pass? The Word that all these events enclose, events that are made present tonight: THAT GOD IS LOVE. This Word saves those who are present, for it says to them: Courage! don't be disheartened! Don't you see how God has broken death, slavery, the sea, the desert...? Am I not strong enough to save you from the particular death you are in and which oppresses you so much it scandalizes you and makes you doubt me? This Word says: ABANDON YOURSELVES TO GOD.

But what is Israel's sin and our sin? It is that in the face of events of death we deny God, we forget him, we try to save ourselves by our own efforts. Because of our fear of death we take refuge in idols and abandon God. This Word tells us that it is God who destroys death, that he has destroyed slavery, opening ways of freedom in history. But what happens? The same as happens to Israel: a marvelous celebration of the Passover... wonderful; everything very beautiful... God is love, he saves

us, it's true. How wonderful! But then you go home and discover that your son has left home, or things aren't going as you want, so you deny God, you blaspheme.

What makes us deny that God exists? Suffering and death. If God is so good, why does he let the war in Vietnam, earthquakes, hunger, cancer, disasters, happen? Suffering and death challenge the existence of God. They say that God does not exist; that God is not love. The cross is a scandal for the world.



The Exodus presents the events of salvation that God has carried out. It is God who frees and saves, who makes death glorious, who is in the midst of his people. And he only asks one thing: abandon yourself to God. But the people of Israel, just like you and me, when the cross, death, appear, deny God. Everything that has happened up until now has been by chance. Let God give us water right now, or we won't believe in him.

This is your reality and mine: we need physical assurances. We're only interested in a God who is at our service, who gives us the happiness we want and right away. We want to grasp everything with our reason. Not one of us abandons ourselves to the plan of God: this is our sin.

This Passover is calling us. It's saying: who will abandon himself to God; who will transcend himself in God, making him his rock and his bulwark?

There is only one person who has fulfilled this Passover: JESUS CHRIST. JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS TAKEN ON THIS WORD. HE IS THE PASSOVER MADE FLESH.

In the face of the cross, Jesus Christ didn't doubt. He didn't reject the cross that the world had prepared for him. He didn't ask God for assurances or signs. HE SAW IN THE CROSS THE CHALICE HIS FATHER HAD PREPARED FOR HIM. When Peter says to him: "Nobody is going to kill you," he answered. "Get behind me, Satan. Will you not let me drink the chalice that my Father wants me to drink?" (Mt 16:23; 20:22).

JESUS CHRIST IS THE FULFILMENT, THE FULLNESS OF THE PASSOVER.

That's why, in the context of the Passover celebration, the memorial of the escape from Egypt, he says: This liturgy, this night, will no longer be a memorial for you of your delivery from Egypt. THIS IS MY MEMORIAL. This bread will no longer be for you the bread of misery that your fathers ate in the desert; THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS DELIVERED UP TO DEATH FOR YOU. This cup of wine will no longer be for you the memorial of the Covenant on Sinai; THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE NEW AND EVERLASTING COVENANT WHICH WILL BE SHED FOR YOU; DO ALL THIS IN MEMORIAL OF ME.

The bread is really Christ's body that he delivers up to death to destroy death, so we can have eternal life, so we can pass to the Kingdom. The wine is really the blood of Jesus Christ, blood of the new and eternal covenant, of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ sees the fulfilling of his hour in the wine. That is why in the wedding feast at Cana he says to Mary: My hour has not yet come (see Jn 2:4). We think that this means that the time hasn't come yet for him to start doing miracles. But it's not this. Jesus speaks of his hour, the hour of doing the Father's will, the hour of passing from this world to the Father. That's why he swears at the last supper: I shall no more drink the fruit of the vine until I have entered into my Kingdom.

The land of Canaan is a symbol of the land of resurrection, the Kingdom of Heaven, eternal life. Who has entered this land? Jesus Christ. The Word of God has entered with his human nature into divinity. AT THAT MOMENT ALL THE PROMISES ARE FULFILLED. IN THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST ALL THE PROMISES OF SALVATION FOR HUMANITY ARE COMPLETELY FULFILLED. The wine is fulfilled, the barriers of death are broken, humanity has access to eternal life through the Holy Spirit.

This is why the wine is humanity's entry into eternity, into happiness, feasting, eternal life, God's Kingdom. Christ's spilt blood is the price paid for us to receive eternal life, the Holy Spirit.

What is the guarantee of eternal life? The Holy Spirit. We know we're in the kingdom, that we have eternal life, if we have the seal of the Holy Spirit. Whoever does not have the Holy Spirit cannot celebrate the Eucharist, for he is not in the kingdom of God. Theology says that if you're not in the grace of

God you can't receive communion.¹⁰ This means that whoever doesn't have the Holy Spirit, God's gift, cannot celebrate the Eucharist. Because if you're a slave in Egypt, if you're not in the Kingdom, what are you going to bless God for? If you haven't felt that you were in Egypt and that God took you out, that he had mercy on you, called you, wiped out all your sins gratis, gave you his own LIFE in the Holy Spirit, what do you have to thank him for? What reason have you to exult? This is why the catechumens don't celebrate the Eucharist.

If you have felt God's life in you, because you love your enemy, then how can you not celebrate, exult and bless God in the Eucharist, making a memorial to the Lord on a Saturday night, when, liturgically, Sunday begins?

St. John says: We know we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers (see 1 Jn 3:14). The primitive Church which had experienced this, met on Saturday nights to celebrate the Eucharist. (Jesus rose on the night between Saturday and Sunday.)

At first they had a meal in the middle, but soon saw that they had to do without it. Taking this away left them with the single blessing with the bread and wine, which is the anaphora. But we'll see this better when we speak about the history of the Eucharist this afternoon.

One more thing: to take part tonight, in the way we shall do, participating in the body and blood of Christ with the two species (we'll explain how later), is first of all to say Amen to entering into death. This is important. To take the body of Jesus Christ is to take part in his death, just as for the Hebrews it was to take part in the slavery of Egypt. To take the blood of Jesus Christ is to take part in resurrection of Jesus Christ, as for the Hebrews it was to enter into the promised land, the fulfillment of the covenant.

When one day we are able to love, we can really celebrate Jesus' Passover. We're incapable of living the Passover. Only Jesus has lived it. We celebrate many rites, but when we go out into the street we forget everything. IN JESUS CHRIST WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE PASSOVER FULFILLED FREELY, BECAUSE HE IS THE WORD OF GOD MADE FLESH. Only through his body can you enter death and conquer it.

When this is fulfilled in you, you will have no doubts when faced with the events of death. You will enter death because you have Jesus Christ with you, he who conquers death; for you have eternal life inside you and you can walk over death. Then you will participate in the resurrection in his victorious blood, his triumph over death.

The Eucharist is the sacrament that makes present all the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. In it we proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ and await his coming.

¹⁰ CCC 1415: Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of penance.

LUNCH at 2:00 p.m.

REST

CATECHESIS ON THE EUCHARIST (II): HISTORY OF THE EUCHARIST
at 4:30 p.m.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The Mass of all ages (1345-1347); the celebration of the Eucharist: the first day of the week (1166-1167, 1342-1344, 2174-2188); the assembly that celebrates (1140-1144); where the liturgy is celebrated (1179-1186); the movement of the celebration (1348-1355); presences of Christ (1088, 1348, 1349); the real presence of Christ (1357, 1373-1381); the paschal banquet (1382-1401).

(Carmen)

Just imagine what the Eucharist was in the primitive Church - this memorial of the manifestation of the risen Christ, through the Holy Spirit revealed and communicated to men, which enables them to participate in the work of Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Just imagine what was the festive explosion of the first Christian communities in the Eucharist.

Bouyer says that if we go to the sources to discover the first Eucharist, the first Eucharistic celebration, we'll find a real explosion that is like a tree flourishing with life.

The primitive Eucharist, which is this Passover way, a way opened up by the Passover of Jesus Christ, is like a star, a powerful light raised above history. This light is manifested in the Church, like a tree, like a harmony of different forms.

The song to the Passover of Jesus Christ, which is the center of the Eucharist, the anaphora (a Greek term that corresponds with the Latin *canon*, in English "eucharistic prayer") appears in many forms. Bouyer says that whoever goes to the sources will find the Syrian and Coptic Churches etc. with a great flourishing of eucharistic prayers. But the surprising thing is the unity and the internal congruence of all this flourishing. They are all united by the Passover. Each anaphora is a facet of the immense grandeur of the Passover.

What I'd like to explain now at lightning speed is how the primitive Church lived the Eucharist and how down through the centuries it became covered over and dressed up to such an extent that in our Mass we hardly see the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let's try to see what happened to the primitive Eucharist in the course of history. This excursus will help us to understand what is happening today and the liturgical renewal of the Council.¹

¹ On the history of the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist and its fundamental structure, preserved through the centuries, refer to CCC 1345-1355:

CCC 1345: As early as the second century we have the witness of St. Justin Martyr for the basic lines of the order of the Eucharistic celebration. They have stayed the same until our own day for all the great liturgical families. St. Justin wrote

The primitive Church that started off in Jerusalem soon spread to Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople. These are the five Churches, the oldest Patriarchates. All these Churches lived the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Christian mystery, with great vigor and power and a great variety of eucharistic prayers flourished. But within three or four centuries, two flourishing Churches will gain preeminence above all the others: the one of Rome and the one of Constantinople. After the Christian peace, these two Churches are characterized by their very elaborate, very embellished, rites. We shouldn't fall in love with the oriental rites too easily for they are just as embellished as those of Rome, though in a different way.

Today we're beginning to see the liturgical riches of these early Churches because, as I was saying this morning, of the men who have dedicated their lives to searching back towards the sources, to discovering the first Eucharists. Not everybody can read Syrian and understand the ancient texts. Behind this liturgical renewal that we're living today are the lives of

to the pagan emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161) around the year 155, explaining what Christians did: "On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things. Then we all rise together and offer prayers* for ourselves... and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation. When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss. Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: 'Amen.' When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the "eucharisted" bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent" (*St. Justin*).

CCC 1348: *All gather together.* Christians come together in one place for the Eucharistic assembly. At its head is Christ himself, the principal agent of the Eucharist. He is high priest of the New Covenant; it is he himself who presides invisibly over every Eucharistic celebration. It is in representing him that the bishop or priest acting in the person of Christ the head (in persona Christi capitis) presides over the assembly, speaks after the readings, receives the offerings and says the Eucharistic Prayer. *All* have their own active parts to play in the celebration, each in his own way: readers, those who bring up the offerings, those who give communion and the whole people whose "Amen" manifests their participation.

dedicated men. Dom Botte, who was the soul of the Council's liturgical renewal, is now an old man who has spent all his life studying the sources. In the field of liturgy he is the highest authority and so what he said at the Council was definitive. Just by the way he translated some material he threw out entire theological interpretations. For in these texts there is the lived experience of the Church and there is nothing further to be said.

Let's see what the Eucharist was like during the 1st-3rd centuries.

To do this let's take a text of St. Justin. St. Justin, who lived about the year 150, is a very interesting person because he was born in Samaria, of Greek parents, he wrote in Rome, therefore he knew all the Mediterranean basin perfectly and all the tradition of the primitive Church. What he writes is not done with the specific intention of explaining a Christian Eucharist, but to defend Christianity in front of the emperor. He writes an apology for the Christians who were being accused of having strange meetings. He says that no, they are in fact doing quite simple things. To this end he explains what was a primitive Christian Eucharist. Let's see the essential lines.

(Kiko)

What Carmen is going to do will explain a little of the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. Perhaps many of you haven't understood exactly the meaning of the changes that have been made in the Mass. We've got to understand what underlies these changes. That's why it's very interesting to see the evolution of the Eucharist throughout its history.

(Carmen)

St. Justin says:

On the day we call the day of the sun there is an assembly of all who live in the towns and the country.

The first thing we find is the day of the sun: SUNDAY.² In the primitive Church the Passover was the center of all the

² CCC 1166: "By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ's Resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery every seventh day, which day is appropriately called the Lord's Day or Sunday" (SC 106). The day of Christ's Resurrection is both the first day of the week, the memorial of the first day of creation and the "eighth day," on which Christ after his "rest" on the great Sabbath inaugurates the "day that the Lord has made," the "day that knows no evening." (*Byzantine liturgy*) The Lord's Supper is its center, for there the whole community of the faithful encounters the risen Lord who invites them to his banquet (see Jn 21:12; Lk 24:30).

CCC 2174: Jesus rose from the dead "on the first day of the week" (see Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1). Because it is the "first day," the day of Christ's Resurrection recalls the

feasts. Other feasts, like Christmas and others, which came later, didn't yet exist. We'll see later when these other feasts begin. The great feast for the Christians was the Passover Vigil and, as an extension of and emanation from this, the Sunday.

This was just like the Jews who celebrates the Passover night and, as a prolongation, the "shabbat", which is the same but simpler. For Christians the primordial sacrament, instituted and inaugurated by Jesus Christ as his memorial, is the Passover night and, as a prolongation and participation in this night, Sunday.

Sunday has a special significance, because the celebration is a feast that introduces us to REST; it's the entry into eternity, into the eternal rest. A Jew can understand this very well. And since the sacraments aren't things that one invents, but realities, you've got to be reposing and physically at rest as a sign. For the Jew, there's no distinction between body and soul and they cannot even think about a Passover that you spend working or as if it were any ordinary day. Man is a unity and experiences rest in its entirety. The essence of the Passover is the eternal rest it inaugurates. And as the first Christians came from the same background, to them too the Sunday means rest.

St. Justin says: "On the day of the sun they celebrate the meeting." So we've got the ASSEMBLY³ that gathers together. In no way did the primitive Church think in terms of an "individual" eucharistic rite. The Jews cannot celebrate Passover unless there are at least eleven people in the family group. For the sacrament is not only the bread and wine, but also the assembly, the whole Church that celebrates (see SC 7;

first creation. Because it is the "eighth day" following the Sabbath (see Mk 16:1; Mt 28:1), it symbolizes the new creation ushered in by Christ's Resurrection. For Christians it has become the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord's Day (*he kuriake hemera, dies dominica*), Sunday.

³ CCC 1141: The celebrating assembly is the community of the baptized who, "by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that... they may offer spiritual sacrifices" (LG 10; cf. 1 Pt 2:4-5). This "common priesthood" is that of Christ the sole priest, in which all his members participate (see LG 10; 34; PO 2).

CCC 1142: But "the members do not all have the same function" (Rom 12:4). Certain members are called by God, in and through the Church, to a special service of the community. These servants are chosen and consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which the Holy Spirit enables them to act in the person of Christ the head, for the service of all the members of the Church (see PO 2; 15). The ordained minister is, as it were, an "icon" of Christ the priest. Since it is in the Eucharist that the sacrament of the Church is made fully visible, it is in his presiding at the Eucharist that the bishop's ministry is most evident, as well as, in communion with him, the ministry of priests and deacons.

Eucharisticum mysterium 9). In the primitive Church there is no Eucharist without an assembly that celebrates it. This is so true that this principle has been maintained throughout the centuries. (As we'll see, it was the monks who introduced the so-called "private" Masses - because they were said without the presence of the faithful or at least an assistant. In the 12th century Pope Alexander III prohibited these individual Masses and laid it down that there should be at least one person to reply to and assist the celebrant. The Code of Canon Law [1917, c. 813,1] maintained this norm, one which there is a serious obligation to observe)⁴. It is an entire assembly that celebrates the feast and the Eucharist, because the Eucharist is the exultation of the human assembly that is in communion; because it is precisely in this created Church, in this communion, the place where it can be seen that God has acted. It is from this assembly that the Eucharist springs forth. It is obviously a feast.

St. Justin continues:

And here they proclaim, as far as time allows, their memories of the apostles or the writings of the prophets.

We find another element: the WORD OF GOD.

The Word is proclaimed abundantly. In all the Eastern liturgies they have at least four readings: from the historical books of the Old Testament, from the Prophets, from the Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles and from the Gospel.

At a certain point the Church of Alexandria no longer understood the Old Testament and abandons it. But in any case they had a very abundant proclamation of the Word. Moreover they didn't have the idea that we have of our three readings, listening to them from a doctrinal point of view in order to learn something. This Word has the characteristic of being not a reading but a proclamation that is fulfilled in the assembly.

The assembly doesn't "read," but "proclaims" facts they had lived. For this Word in itself is experience. So that these readings, which have been written, receive body and life in an assembly that is proclaiming them. The one who listens to the Word is a "catechumen"; a person who is of the Church is not just a catechumen who listens, but he proclaims the Word.

Then Justin says:

After the reading, the president gives the exhortation.

That's to say, here we find the HOMILY. This was so in all the Churches. The president doesn't preach moralistic sermons, he doesn't start off telling us: "we must" be good and not bad and "we must..." When he gives the homily the president above

⁴ The new *Code of Canon Law* (1983) keeps this in Canon 906. In cases in which, "for good and reasonable cause," the priest celebrates alone (see CCL 906; cf. also Pius VI, *Auctorem Fidei*), the assembly is represented by the priest who is at the same time priest and member of the faithful, head and member of the body of the Church.

all makes actual for today the Word that has been proclaimed, shows that it is present in the assembly, announcing it kerygmatically actualizing it and "bringing it down to earth" concretely in that assembly.

This is what Jesus Christ does in the synagogue at Nazareth when he goes up, opens the scroll of the Law and reads from the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." Jesus rolls up the scroll and says: "This Word is fulfilled today because the Spirit of God is upon me, he has anointed me..." (see Lk 4:16-21). Jesus Christ doesn't say this because he is the only one who can. The Church can always say this, because it's a reality in her: the Word is fulfilled in the Church that proclaims it. Making the Word present is essentially what a homily is. All this is very difficult to do because it's much easier to demand from the people than to give to them. The Word is to give; it's God revealing himself to the Church. To do this, the President has his ministry. Moses laid his hands on Joshua to transmit the Word to him (see Dt 34:9), so that it would take life in him. Indeed the Word is living, not just something written.

In the homilies that we have of the Fathers of the Church, we find less by the bishops of Rome, compared with those of the Eastern Church. The first thing to be left out in the Church of Rome was the homily. Because to give a living homily is very difficult. It's a lot easier to give moralizing sermons.

St. Justin continues:

Then we all rise together and offer our prayers.

Now there is the PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL OR THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER. This prayer was never left out of a liturgy. This comes from Jesus Christ who does the prayer during the last supper. This was already done in the synagogue.

It is a prayer and not prayers. And "of the faithful" because the catechumens, who weren't yet fully part of the Church, didn't do it; only the baptized believers. Exactly like Israel, the Church doesn't feel herself better than any other people, but simply knows her mission to be mediator among the nations.

This prayer is also called the universal prayer, that is, it is for all men. In the Roman rite this is kept for Good Friday only. Today the Church is recovering the prayer. The thing is, since no one really understands what it's about, many confusing things are done, like those litanies where nobody prays. It is the whole assembly interceding for all the universe. Fr Farnés says that he is very much afraid that this prayer will dwindle to something like an individual dialogue with the Blessed Sacrament or something of the sort.

St. Justin continues:

Once the prayer is finished, we give each other the kiss of peace.

Here we find the KISS OF PEACE. This exists since the most primitive liturgies.

And then:

Afterwards, as we have already said, the bread and wine are brought and the President raises the thanksgiving to God with all his strength and all the people acclaim saying "Amen."

This is the anaphora - the blessing or thanksgiving. Afterwards comes all the communion rite, etc.

This thing so simple is a primitive Eucharist. The Word is part of the Eucharist, it is part of the memorial, because it's not a question of learning things, but it is a proclamation. After having made present all the history of salvation, this memorial culminates in the sacrament of the bread and the wine which realizes and makes present the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Breaking and eating the bread, the body of Christ, we enter death; drinking the wine we make a covenant in his blood and make Passover with Jesus Christ. Faced with this realization we proclaim: "Come, Lord Jesus! Fulfill once and for all your Passover among men!"

A primitive Eucharist that is of such a simplicity also has an enormous diversity. But the living soul of all these Eucharists is always the Mystery of Christ's Passover. It's the whole Jewish tradition culminated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This resurrection has poured out a new Spirit among men, a life-giving Spirit, which has given birth to the Church that proclaims the event in which she finds herself. They are in communion because they form one single Spirit. "We announce your death, we proclaim your resurrection, come, Lord Jesus."

This anaphora has as many different forms as the different people who sing it. The Syriac Eastern Church, which is a very interesting Church because it remained outside the Roman Empire, has more than 78 different anaphoras, but all share the same perfect unity. It is like a symphony with many themes. The unity of it all: the Passover of Jesus Christ.

(Kiko)

Don't think that in the primitive Church they had a piece of paper for the president to read from, like we have now. Today we have four anaphoras. Back then whoever was presiding gave thanks (without reading anything) with all his might, with all the fervor he had, recounting the history of salvation. Later on, when they were already further away from the source, the canons were fixed. Nowadays in the Eastern Churches you find a great variety of anaphoras because they used to collect the best.

(Carmen)

Let's see what happened to the Eucharist in the 4th-8th centuries.

We have a key date: 314, the year of Constantine's edict of peace. The Church begins to change from being made up of small,

persecuted communities to being the official religion of the empire and therefore protected. This affects enormously the development of the Eucharist and of the whole liturgy, because masses of people enter the Church without having been catechized.

During these centuries the Church made great efforts to catechize also about the mystery of the Eucharist. Particularly in the 4th and 5th centuries we have very well documented sources on some aspects of the celebration: the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the *Mystagogic Catechesis* of Cyril of Jerusalem, of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the testimonies of the Western Fathers, such as Ambrose and Augustine and of the Eastern Fathers, such as John Chrysostom. As well as this, it is the period of the formation of the anaphoras and of the Roman canon itself.

At the same time they built enormous basilicas that brought elements of solemnity and grandeur into the liturgy. From this time on the powerful light of the primitive Church is covered over and obscured by elements of solemnity. The purity of the primitive liturgy gets covered over by overelaborate accretions (see Council of Trent, Session XXII, Decree on the celebration of Mass; SC 21).

Let's take a look at some of these elements of pomp.

With great solemnity, the Pope and his court enter the basilica: the entrance rite or introit develops, an entrance procession with songs. The introit acquires great importance.

Remember that the churches are now full of people who aren't Jews and haven't lived the Passover from generation to generation. They come from pagan temples where they performed their worship and, not having been sufficiently catechized - hence the great catechetical effort of the Fathers - they begin to see in Christian worship the things they did in their old religion. Each person sees things according to his own inner experience and with his own spectacles. None of these people lives the Passover any longer, but has his own particular way of thinking about God and the relationship with him.

Another aspect of the solemnity and religiosity is the offertory procession.

There was no such procession in the primitive Church. As we go on reading St. Justin, we would learn that after celebrating the mysteries:

Those who have an abundance and who wish to, each according to his own decision, gives what he wants and what is collected is given to the President; he helps the orphans, the widows and those in need.

So there is communion of goods, a manifestation of the fact that the Church is a true communion. However, this does not have a place within the rite but is a consequence of it in the lives of people who live with the one spirit.

Now this communion of goods begins to be transformed into the offering of things: fruit, lambs, etc., various things offered to God to placate him and make him look with favor on the people in the pagan sense. For a certain time Israel too had

this pagan sense of the sacrificial worship but we have already seen how little by little God purified this (see Mal 1:10-11; Am 5:21-26), bringing them from an idolatrous way of living the sacrifices of the temple to a liturgy of praise, a "sacrifice of praise" (see Ps 49:14, 23), of glorification and to that extraordinary spirituality which is the Passover celebration. Now these people who are entering the Church go back to what the people of Israel had already left behind and begin to see the Christian liturgy with the mentality of the pagan religious rites. They go with fear to offer things to God so that he will show them favor and do their will.

Just see how far away from the Passover we are by this time. The Christian is not afraid and celebrates Passover as an explosion of joy because Christ is in him and this is his greatest security. The intervention of God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is what makes him break into exultation. They are not afraid at all; the risen Christ goes before them.

In their catechesis the Fathers of the Church had always underlined the true offertorial dimension of the Eucharist: Jesus Christ - and we associated with him - offers himself to the Father. The Church, in the Holy Spirit, offers Jesus Christ, the immolated victim, to the Father and the faithful offer themselves with him. (see, for example, the *Anamnesis and offering of Eucharistic Prayer III*).⁵

⁵ John Paul II, *Dominicæ cenæ*, 9: "Although all those who participate in the Eucharist do not confect the sacrifice as He does, they offer with Him, by virtue of the common priesthood, their own spiritual sacrifices represented by the bread and wine from the moment of their presentation at the altar. For this liturgical action, which takes a solemn form in almost all liturgies, has a "spiritual value and meaning." (*Roman Missal*, 73) The bread and wine become, in a sense, a symbol of all that the Eucharistic assembly brings, on its own part, as an offering to God and offers spiritually. It is important that this first moment of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in the strict sense should find expression in the attitude of the participants. There is a link between this and the offertory "procession" provided for in the recent liturgical reform and accompanied, in keeping with ancient tradition, by a psalm or song. CCC 1350: The *presentation of the offerings* (the Offertory). Then, sometimes in procession, the bread and wine are brought to the altar; they will be offered by the priest in the name of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrifice in which they will become his body and blood. It is the very action of Christ at the Last Supper - "taking the bread and a cup." "The Church alone offers this pure oblation to the Creator, when she offers what comes forth from his creation with thanksgiving." (St. Irenæus, *Adversus hæreses*, 4, 18, 4) The presentation of the offerings at the altar takes up the gesture of Melchizedek and commits the Creator's gifts into the hands of Christ who, in his sacrifice, brings to perfection all human attempts to offer sacrifices.

CCC 1351: From the very beginning Christians have brought, along with the bread and wine for the Eucharist, gifts to share

The real "offering" of the Christian to God doesn't consist in giving to God something he would not have without us, but in receiving the free and absolute offering that God has already given to man in Jesus Christ, who offers him the greatest thing of all: the victory of Jesus Christ over death and in letting himself be absorbed completely by Christ, allowing God to work, to bring him to the Father.

At least at the beginning, the offerings were left at the door of the church. Later on, however, since the person who gives always attaches a lot of importance to the things he is offering, they begin to carry the offerings to the altar. So they organize a big procession with all the offerings and with many prayers over them.

The liturgy becomes full of pomp with grandiose songs and music. Christianity is protected by the emperor. The worship becomes very ornate and full of pomp. So we see how things that are secondary cover up and obscure what is essential.

In other churches, since the distance between the sacristy and the altar was fairly short, the introit psalm was reduced to one verse only. Here is an example of things without content that have remained until our time. Psalm 44 sings about the marriage of the King with a foreign princess. In the primitive church the Word is very important. In the spirituality of Israel this psalm prefigured the marriage of God with his people and for the Christians it prefigures the marriage of Jesus Christ with his Church. Well, the psalm has an introduction that says: "My heart overflows with joyful words; I will sing my poem to

with those in need. This custom of the collection, ever appropriate, is inspired by the example of Christ who became poor to make us rich (see 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:9): "Those who are well off and who are also willing, give as each chooses. What is gathered is given to him who presides to assist orphans and widows, those whom illness or any other cause has deprived of resources, prisoners, immigrants and, in a word, all who are in need" (St. Justin, *Apologia* 1, 67, 6).

Roman Missal, 73: "At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts, which will become Christ's Body and Blood, are brought to the altar. First the altar, the Lord's Table, which is the center of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist, is prepared: the corporal, purificator, missal and chalice are placed on it (unless the chalice is prepared at a side table). The gifts are then brought forward. It is praiseworthy for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful. They are then accepted at an appropriate place by the priest or the deacon and carried to the altar. Even though the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as in the past, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still retains its force and its spiritual significance. It is well also that money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church brought by the faithful or collected in the church, should be received. These are to be put in a suitable place but away from the Eucharistic table.

the king." When the introit was reduced to only one verse, only the introduction to the psalm was retained and it wasn't sung...

But more than anything else this mass of pagan people fundamentally sees the Christian liturgy with its own religious eyes: the pagan idea of sacrifice. The earliest tradition of the Church never had problems with the sacrificial sense of the Eucharist, nor ever cast doubts on it, but, however, was very careful to distinguish between the sacrificial character of the Eucharistic banquet and both the Jewish sacrifices of the OT, now superseded and pagan sacrifices, considered to be idolatrous. In front of the Jews, the primitive tradition affirms, as do the *Didache*, Justin, Irenaeus and others, the fulfillment of Malachy's prophecy (Mal 1:11) in the Christian Eucharist: "From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations and in every place incense is offered to my name and a pure offering."⁶

Now however, there is a certain regression to a mentality that Israel had had but that had been left behind even in the Old Testament. Fr. Farnés speaks about this with an example. To construct a building you need to put up a scaffolding. When the

⁶ Cf. Also the Fathers of the Church, for example: "And since in all the sacrifices we keep the memorial of the passion of Christ - and in fact the passion of Christ is the sacrifice we offer - we can do no other than what he did." (ST CYPRIAN, *Epistula*, 63,17) "It is not permissible to break the commandment of the Lord with regard to the sacrament of his passion and our redemption..., in fact, if our Lord and God Christ Jesus in person is the High Priest of God the Father and if he was the first to offer himself to the Father and if he commanded us to do this in his memory, then only the priest acts as the vicar of Christ, when he imitates what Christ did and, only then, offers to God in the Church a true sacrifice in the full sense, if he is ready to make the offering as he has seen Christ do it." (ST CYPRIAN, *Epistula*, 63,14) "All of the redeemed city, that is, the assembly and the society of the saints, offers a universal sacrifice to God through the work of that High Priest who in his passion offered himself for us, assuming the form of a servant and making us into the body of such an important Head... This is the sacrifice of Christians: 'so we, though many, are one body in Christ.' (Rom 12:5) And the Church continually renews this in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God." (ST AUGUSTINE, *De civitate Dei*, 10,6) "Do we not offer the sacrifice every day? Certainly, but the celebration of the memorial of his death and this sacrifice is only one and not many... For it was offered only once, as is also the victim of expiation carried to the sanctuary... Our High Priest is he who has offered the sacrifice which purifies us. Now we offer the same sacrifice which was offered then and which cannot be consummated again. The present one is a memorial of what took place then... Or, better, we celebrate the memorial of the sacrifice." (ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilia in Epistulam ad Hebreos*, 17,3)

building is finished, the scaffolding is taken away. In the building that God is constructing in the history of salvation, there is scaffolding which is these pagan ideas of sacrifice that Israel had but that was left behind by Israel herself in the Passover liturgy. To go back now to the sacrificial and sacerdotal ideas of paganism is like going back to erect the scaffolding again after the building has been finished.

This is why, when in the middle ages people began to argue about sacrifice, some of them would argue about things that had a very different meaning in the primitive Eucharist.

In pagan religion sacrifice, "*sacrum facere*," "to do what is sacred," is to propitiate the divinity through sacrifices of animals or of things. This is not the meaning of sacrifice neither in Christianity nor in the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist there is the only sacrifice pleasing to God: the offering that Jesus Christ does of his life to the Father by dying on the cross for us. But not just this. For in the Eucharist there is also the resurrection from death. The Eucharist is Passover, the passage from death to resurrection. This is why to say that the Eucharist is a sacrifice is true but incomplete. This is why the Second Vatican Council defines the Eucharist as: "Eucharistic Sacrifice of his Body and Blood," "Sacrifice of the cross," "memorial of his death and resurrection," "paschal banquet" (SC 47). The Eucharist is above all a sacrifice of praise, "*sacrificium laudis*," a complete praise of communication with God through the Passover of the Lord.⁷

⁷ On the Eucharist as sacrifice of praise to the Father and as memorial of the sacrifice of Christ and his Body, the Church, refer to CCC 1356-1372:

CCC 1360: The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all "thanksgiving."

CCC 1363: In the sense of Sacred Scripture the *memorial* is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men (cf. Ex 13:3). In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them.

CCC 1364: In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present (see Heb 7:25-27). "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out."

CCC 1365: Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. The sacrificial character of

But in this period sacrifice is understood much more in a pagan way than in a Christian one.

Moreover what many people see in the Mass is only that Jesus Christ sacrifices himself, they see only the sacrifice of the cross of Jesus Christ and not his resurrection. They don't see the Passover, the passage from death to resurrection. And even today if you were to ask people about this, many would say that all they see in the Mass is Calvary.

Little by little the Mass is covered over.

In this period the Gloria also enters the Mass. The Gloria is a marvelous hymn from the Office of Matins. It was probably inserted into the Mass after the Kyrie because of its doxological, Trinitarian character.

The Creed too enters in the Mass during these centuries, beginning in Constantinople in the 6th century, as an antidote to the heresies. In Rome the Creed didn't enter as a fixed thing until the 12th century. When the Emperor Henry II went to Rome for his coronation, he expressed to Pope Benedict VIII (1012-1024) his amazement that he hadn't heard the Creed during the Mass. Rome has always been slow to introduce things.

Now let's look at the Eucharist from the 8th-15th centuries.

As you can see I don't enter in many details, but many particulars could be mentioned. We're giving a general view.

This is the period both of allegorical interpretations of the Mass and of explanations of it in the service of an "intellectual knowledge" of the eucharistic mystery on the part of monastic and scholastic theology. But if we've already found ourselves with people who neither lived nor understood the Passover, now we find ourselves with people who don't even understand Latin. In Germany they've never understood it. In France they didn't understand it after the 10th century and in Italy and Spain after the 13th century. So we find vast numbers of people who don't understand a thing. Yves Congar says: "The eyes see what the ears do not understand." So people had to imagine things.

Big paintings that show Christ's life and miracles appear in the churches. From the people of Israel, a people of the listening, we've changed to a people of the imagination. People imagine things, so in the Mass there aren't two people living the same thing. And more than that, as the Mass has not yet been fixed and there is great freedom, we can witness an invasion of private prayers right in the Mass. This period is marked by the introduction of prayer after prayer into the Mass. There were already all the offertory prayers. Now, as the Introit is sung but the procession is brief, because only the priest and

the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood." (Lk 22:19-20) In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt 26:28)

acolytes enter and the distance is short, the priest says many prayers at the foot of the altar to fill up the entrance rite. You remember the "I will go up to the altar...", "Our help is in the name of the Lord..." the "Confiteor," etc.

In the time of Pius V, all these prayers are fixed, because until then, since everyone had great freedom of introducing them according to his own particular devotions, this led to great abuses. Now the Mass is covered all over by the private prayers of the priests. The Canon remains full of these prayers.

Moreover, all these prayers were penitential in tone and in the singular. The sense of the assembly has been disappearing. Now the priest says "his" Mass and the poor man feels very unworthy of approaching God. So he begins to express his unworthiness and to ask forgiveness continually: "Take away, I ask you, my iniquity...;" "Look with pity on my sins...;" "With a humble spirit and contrite heart..."

You see how far we've come from the burst of happiness and festivity of the Eucharist. We have a Mass laden with a penitential sense, the center of which is man trying to make himself pleasing to God to be able to approach him. We are now very far away from the Passover where God intervenes to pull men towards him. Now it's the other way round and the Masses are lived almost as if they were favors that we are doing God.

But people know that the Mass encloses something sacred and very great. That's why, in order to say Mass, the priest has to be ordained, to have his hands anointed. Because the people know that the Mass has such great value, infinite value, they begin to pay the priests to say Masses for very varied intentions. The number of Masses begins to be very important. Masses are said more and more frequently and their number grows. The Mass comes to be seen as some kind of magic cure-all. Side altars appear where each priest says "his" Mass. We find the private Masses introduced by the monks... With all this, the assembly has practically disappeared, the community that exults in the Eucharist and the feast. The Eucharist seems reduced to something that has power and so has to be done for specific purposes.

As the Jewish origins of the Eucharist are by this time being lost sight of, rationalistic theological arguments arise to explain something that they don't even know what it is. Because of the western rationalistic mentality that tends to make reason a god, the visibility of the sacramental signs is devalued in favor of rational, abstract explanations. Today we have the privilege to be living in an time when, also because of psychology, anthropology etc., we are rediscovering the value of the visibility of signs, which speak to man far more than reason does. Things that can't be understood rationally are expressed in signs and symbols.

But in those centuries, what mattered was not so much Sundays, feasts, the assembly and so on, but saying lots of Masses. (This is so true that Russian Christians, for example, were scandalized that in the west so many daily Masses were said; for them this was a kind of sacrilege.) In Spain there were certain priests called "altar priests" who spent all their

time saying Masses, as many as possible. The 10th century was the most decadent also in regard to the liturgy. We arrive to a of great superstition. It reached the point where Masses were said so that a certain bishop would die; for all sorts of abuses. The people who attack the Church, if they knew about certain sacramentary of those times, they would do it with more strength, so great was the level of superstition that was reached.

With Pope Innocent III, there was an attempt at reform in the Fourth Lateran Council, with the aim of readjusting things and wiping out abuses. The obligation to receive communion at least one a year, at Easter, was imposed.

It was also during this period that the Missal used by the Roman curia began to spread throughout the west, due especially to the work of the Friars Minor. Churches that had their own liturgies began to use this Missal. In this way many abuses were corrected but at the same time liturgical variety was lost.

Now let us see the Eucharist from the Council of Trent (16th century) to the present time.

With regard to the Mass, Luther made a lot of mistakes for he didn't know the sources either. The only thing he had was the Bible. And when he saw that the Bible spoke about a supper, he laid a table. Therefore he gave importance only to the words of the consecration that are in the Gospel and got rid of what seemed to him to be an inventions of the previous centuries. What he did was to make the Mass even more incomprehensible. Luther limited himself to do only what Christ said at the last supper, ignoring the context in which Christ was acting just because he didn't know it. The Church at least had kept the essential nucleus of the Eucharist within the Canon, even if greatly covered over. But Luther thinking that the Canon was an ecclesiastical invention, because he couldn't find it in the Scriptures, destroyed the Mass. Instead, in the preface and the Canon, the Church conserved the essential, even if many non-essential things were added on.

The Council of Trent carried out a profound renewal of the Eucharist, trying to eliminate "many elements extraneous to the dignity of such a sacrament, [that is] what has been introduced because of avarice, irreverence or superstition, false imitations of true piety" (Session XXII; *Decree on the celebration of the Mass*).

The Council also recalls the paschal dimension of the Eucharist in the gift "in which are represented the victory and triumph of his death" (Session XIII, *Decree "De Ss.ma Eucharistia,"* cap. V; cf. SC 6).

To avoid the continual addition of new prayers, Trent fixed the Roman rite of the Mass. From now on nothing could be taken out or added to the Mass. And this is how the Mass has come down to us. (This invariability lasted so long that when for the first time with St. Pius X, but especially with the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council, the celebration of the Mass was changed, we were scandalized because it had seemed immutable. This is a mistake. The liturgy is alive, in a state

of constant renewal. Remember the diversity of Eucharists in the primitive Church and yet all in perfect unity. Liturgy is life. It is a reality: the Spirit living among men. This can never be put in a cage, goes beyond every mold and has new forms all the time. The interesting thing is the unity of the content. This is why true renewal will never finish because it is always in search of a more expressive manifestation of what is life.)

At this time philosophies of the Eucharist take on great importance.

When it is not well understood what is a sacrament, or what is "memorial," when there is a depreciation in the visibility of the sacramental signs, there is more emphasis on rational explanations of the mystery. Precisely because the mystery is transcendent, it is made truly explicit in the sacrament. The sacrament speaks more than reasonings do. But at that time, since the sense of sacramental language is lost, the accent is on giving philosophic explanations of the mystery. And so increasingly there are arguments about the nature of the real presence. Luther never explicitly denied the real presence. What he did deny was the word "transubstantiation."

The primitive Church never had problems about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁸

Already for the Jews, God was present in the celebration of the Passover. God is completely present, in an efficacious way, as we say; it is a sacramental, real, authentic presence; it is a memorial. How is it possible for the Passover to be fulfilled if the strong arm of Yahweh who pulls us out of Egypt is not present?

The primitive Church had no doubt that Christ is present in the Eucharist. But his presence is not an end in itself. Jesus Christ came to this world to take on an hour: the hour to pass from this world to the Father (see Jn 12:27; 12:47; 13:1; 16:28). In other words, the physical presence of Jesus Christ in the world has a purpose, which is to enter into death, rise and go to the Father. This is the fundamental thing. The presence is the means to this end, which is his work: the Mystery of the Passover.

In the Eucharist too, the "true, real and substantial" presence of Jesus Christ is in function of the Passover. Jesus Christ himself, dead, risen and constituted life-giving Spirit, makes himself really present in the memorial which he left to the Church, to pass to the Father all those who celebrate the

⁸ On the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, operating through the power of his Word and the Holy Spirit, refer to CCC 1373-1381:

CCC 1413: By the consecration the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity (see Council of Trent: DS 1640; 1651).

Eucharist, all those who celebrate the Passover with him. The primitive Church never found his real presence any problem.

It is when this real presence of Jesus Christ in the sacrament in function of his making Passover with his Church is not understood that philosophical explanations take on an excessive importance, the debates about how Christ is present: with or without eyes, physically or spiritually, etc. Many of these explanations have a false basis: that of trying to explain the mystery in a rational way, of trying in some way to make disappear its nature which transcend reason. So the fact that the Dutch or other people have now invented such things as "transfinalization" or "transignification," it all comes to the same thing in the end: they are only philosophical explanations which, in this case, on top of everything else, do not adequately express the faith of the Church in the mystery of the real presence.

The sacraments can be discussed but not explained by reason because God gives the sacrament precisely as memorial, for the mystery is not in opposition to but surpasses and transcends the reason. If this weren't the case, God would have given us a philosophy to explain what he is.

Luther raised another problem: he wanted to stress the necessity of the disposition of the subject in order for the sacraments to produce fruits, but he went wrong because he made this into the efficacious cause of the sacraments and so denied the efficacy of the sacraments in themselves. This is why the Council of Trent particularly underlines this aspect that was denied by the Protestants: "If anyone says that the sacraments are only external signs of grace, let him be anathema."

Every sacrament is made up of two elements: one is the exterior sign, perceptible to the senses, which makes the sanctifying grace visible; the other is the efficacy of this sign: the giving of the sanctifying grace that the external sign signifies. The Protestants gave so much importance to the first element that they denied the second. So the Council of Trent had to particularly stress the second: the sacraments always give the grace that they signify. The Council spoke the truth, maintaining the importance of the two elements. But many of those who came after, in order to better oppose the Protestants, so much emphasized the efficacy of the sacraments that they practically neglected the importance of the exterior sign. So obviously it is the same whether you receive communion with bread or a host that looks like paper; it is the same if one person drinks from the cup or everyone drinks. The Canon says: "He took the chalice, gave thanks and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and drink all of you..." And it happens that only the priest drinks and everyone is fine. Without a doubt the sacrament is fulfilled in regard to the efficacy; but the external sign has lost almost all importance.

It's important to insist on this. Of the two elements of the sign, we're left with the efficacy. Fr Farnés makes a comparison. If rain falls and you want to collect it, it's not the same if you do it with a basket or a bucket. No doubt that in both cases the rain is efficacious, it falls, but while with

a basket you only collect a few drops of water, with a bucket you get lots. It happens analogously with the sacraments. The exterior and visible signs prepare man to put himself in the right disposition (*opus operantis* or "cause of disposition to the grace") for receiving the efficacy of the sacrament (*opus operatum* or "the efficient cause of grace"). The bread and wine, as visible, external signs, help and prepare man to receive the action of God. The liturgy is full of visible signs which cannot be set aside for they are indispensable conditions for receiving grace.

Now we can understand better the liturgical renewal of the Eucharistic celebration carried out by the Second Vatican Council.

RENEWAL OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

We've seen how in the course of history the primitive Eucharist was gradually covered over with veils that dimmed its light. So the first thing done by the renewal we experienced has been to take out all those things that had been inserted in the Mass, which were secondary and which hid the main thing.

For the liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time, if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable (SC 21).

So the last Gospel, the prayers at the foot of the altar, the three Hail Mary's etc. were taken out. The renewal has been a cleaning up of all the covering over, so that the nucleus could be seen again in all its splendor. In this way things that are really important begin to be recovered, that is to bring to light "the basic lines of the order of the Eucharistic celebration [which] have stayed the same until our own day for all the great liturgical families" (CCC 1345). In fact, "the liturgy of the Eucharist unfolds according to a fundamental structure which has been preserved throughout the centuries down to our own day. It displays two great parts that form a fundamental unity: the gathering, the *liturgy of the Word*, with readings, homily and general intercessions; the *liturgy of the Eucharist* with the presentation of the bread and wine, the consecratory thanksgiving and the communion." (CCC 1346)

The assembly is being recovered. Masses said simultaneously at side altars have been done away with. However, a true assembly won't exist if not through the formation of communities which live in the Spirit to rejoice in communion.

Latin was translated into the various vernacular languages so that everyone could participate better. Just think what strange things we did, like proclaiming the Word with the lector's back turned to the assembly and in a language that he didn't understand; as though I were talking to you now with my back turned to you. But at the time it seemed to us perfectly normal.

The signs are being recovered. The Second Vatican Council said ~~that~~ the signs are to be recovered in all their richness.

In this restoration both texts and rites should be drawn up so as to express more clearly the holy things that they signify. The Christian people, as far as is possible, should be able to understand them with ease and take part in them fully, actively and as a community (SC 21).

The ancient custom of using bread and not a host that doesn't seem like bread and of having everyone drink from the chalice⁹ is being brought back. The New Missal says:

The meaning of the sign demands that the material for the Eucharistic celebration truly have the appearance of food. It is therefore expedient that the Eucharistic bread, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, be made in such a way that the priest at Mass with a congregation is able in practice to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the faithful. Small hosts are, however, in no way ruled out when the number of those receiving Holy Communion or other pastoral needs require it. The action of the fraction or breaking of bread, which gave its name to the Eucharist in apostolic times, will bring out more clearly the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread and the sign of charity by the fact that the one bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters (General Instruction on the Roman Missal, n.321).

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father's Kingdom (General Instruction on the Roman Missal, n.281).

Sacred pastors should take care to ensure that the faithful who participate in the rite or are present at it are as fully aware as possible of the Catholic teaching on the form of Holy Communion as set forth by the Ecumenical Council of Trent. Above all, they should instruct the Christian faithful that the Catholic faith teaches that Christ, whole and entire and the true Sacrament, is

⁹ The Second Vatican Council had already had it in mind to give Communion under both species in particular cases: "The dogmatic principles which were laid down by the Council of Trent remaining intact, communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious, but also to the laity, in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See, as, for instance, to the newly ordained in the Mass of their sacred ordination, to the newly professed in the Mass of their religious profession and to the newly baptized in the Mass which follows their baptism" (SC 55).

received even under only one species and consequentially that as far as the effects are concerned, those who receive under only one species are not deprived of any of the grace that is necessary for salvation. They are to teach, furthermore, that the Church, in her stewardship of the Sacraments, has the power to set forth or alter whatever provisions, apart from the substance of the Sacraments, that she judges to be most conducive to the veneration of the Sacraments and the well-being of the recipient, in view of changing conditions, times and places. At the same time, the faithful should be encouraged to seek to participate more eagerly in this sacred rite, by which the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is made more fully evident (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, n. 282).

The kiss of peace for the whole assembly is being recovered despite the fact that this is quite difficult for people because we haven't been educated to either the assembly or community.

In the reform, the offertory has been simplified and its original sense as the preparation and presentation of the gifts has been restored; this is the sense it had in the primitive Church where the bread and wine for celebrating the mysteries were simply brought in. The Jewish sense of the blessings that ascend has been recovered even if a "humanistic" element has been inserted: "Blessed are you, Lord, for this bread... the work of human hands..." (The formula that was left is not a very good choice; but then the renewal has only just begun.)

Some priests, who want new things and don't understand what the reform is aiming at, have offertories with big processions in which, together with the bread and wine, lots of other things are brought up, as though this were the great renewal...

In the reform, the Church has, for pastoral reasons, taken account of the difficulties that these changes can provoke among the people who are used to living this moment in an offertorial sense. A significant case with regard to this is the Orate Fratres. This, which was one of those individual, penitential and sacrificial prayers introduced into the Mass in the Middle Ages, was an important moment for the participation of the people. The reform wanted to get rid of it because it was a late addition and not a very good one. The liturgists gave a special explanation to Pope Paul VI on why it would be good to do away with it. He was convinced of the rightness of this, but said that it should not be removed for pastoral reasons. He thought that removing it was a delicate matter because with it the people were actually participating in the celebration and without a catechesis first, getting rid of it would have disconcerted the people.

In fact, the Council said that to achieve a real participation of the people in the liturgy, it was not enough to reform the rites without first forming, catechizing, initiating the people into the liturgy. Otherwise people would be scandalized by the changes and, as they don't understand them, would continue to live the renewed Mass still in their own way. In fact, the people have never stopped taking part in the Mass,

even if during it they went on with their own individual devotions: novenas, rosaries, personal prayers, etc.

The Council says:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations... (SC 14)

With zeal and patience the pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful and also their active participation in the liturgy, both internally and externally... By doing so pastors will be fulfilling one of the chief duties of a faithful dispenser of the mysteries of God. (SC 19).

I want to finish saying something about the reform of the worship of the Eucharist outside the Mass¹⁰.

The primitive Church was so convinced of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist that the problem wasn't even raised. If you'd asked St. Peter if Christ was present in the Eucharist, he'd have been amazed at your even asking. For him, Jesus Christ is a living reality, making Passover and pulling the Church from death to life in the memorial of his Body and Blood. Rather, St. Peter would have been surprised that it was possible to celebrate the Eucharist privately or that only the person presiding drank from the chalice...

In the primitive Church the eucharistic species was reserved for the sick who had not been able to attend the celebration. When they took communion with the eucharistic species, they were participating in the Eucharist, in the Passover, in the feast, which all the brothers and sisters had celebrated in the assembly. (It's like when someone hasn't been able to go to a wedding and they keep a piece of the cake for him so that he can take part in the banquet.) But the worship of the eucharistic species fundamentally took place within the eucharistic celebration.

After the mediaeval heresies about the real presence, there appeared the first manifestation of a eucharistic worship outside the celebration of the Mass: the use of the tabernacle inside churches for the reservation of the species, the feast of Corpus Christi, exposition of and processions with the Blessed Sacrament, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and many other eucharistic devotions.

After the Protestant heresies, dogmatic definitions and philosophical/theological questions about the real presence that began in the Middle Ages take on an enormous importance. (Some of these arguments become quite ridiculous.)

Also as a fruit of this need to reaffirm the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic species, in opposition to the various Protestant denials, the worship of the Eucharist outside the Mass takes on a very great importance and prominence.

¹⁰ On Eucharistic worship outside Mass: CCC 1378-1381.

In the Church this often degenerated into exaggerations and abuses which we ourselves have lived: celebrating the Mass almost exclusively to consecrate the species to replace the reserve in the tabernacle; reducing the Eucharist, memorial of the Paschal Mystery, to the private devotion of the "divine prisoner in the tabernacle;" reducing the Mass to a matter of going to communion; to make of the communion with the Body of Jesus Christ, given up to death for you and with his Blood of the new and everlasting covenant, into a matter of the Baby Jesus who comes into and visits your heart (I myself went to Mass to go to communion and to take away Jesus Christ in my heart); giving more importance to visits to the Blessed Sacrament and other forms of worship outside the Mass than to the celebration of the Eucharist and so on.

Going back to the sources in the early Church, the liturgical reform by the Second Vatican Council, while affirming the positive value of eucharistic worship outside the Mass, put the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, of the Eucharist, back into the center of the eucharistic life of the Church:

The celebration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass is the origin and consummation of the worship shown to the Eucharist outside Mass. Not only are the sacred species which remain after the Mass derived from the Mass, but they are preserved so that those of the faithful who cannot come to Mass may be united to Christ and His Sacrifice celebrated in the Mass, through sacramental communion received with the right dispositions (Eucharisticum mysterium, n.3).

It would be well to recall that the primary and original purpose of the reserving of the sacred species in church outside Mass is the administration of the Viaticum. Secondary ends are the distribution of Communion outside Mass and the adoration of Our Lord Jesus Christ concealed beneath these same species (Eucharisticum mysterium, n.49).

When the faithful adore Christ present in the sacrament, they should remember that this presence derives from the sacrifice and is directed toward both sacramental and spiritual Communion. In consequence, the devotion that leads the faithful to visit the Blessed Sacrament draws them into an ever deeper participation in the Paschal Mystery. It leads them to respond gratefully to the gift of Him who through His humanity constantly pours divine life into the members of His body. Dwelling with Christ our Lord, they enjoy His intimate friendship and pour out their hearts before Him for themselves and their dear ones and pray for the peace and salvation of the world. They offer their entire lives with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit and receive in this wonderful exchange and increase of faith, hope and charity. Thus they nourish those right dispositions which enable them with all due devotion to celebrate the memorial of the Lord and receive frequently the bread given us by the Father. The faithful should therefore strive to worship Christ our Lord in the Blessed

Sacrament, in harmony with their way of life. Pastors should exhort them to this and set them a good example (Eucharisticum mysterium, n.50).

The bread and wine, the Body and Blood of the Lord, are essentially to be eaten and drunk and only secondarily to be exposed etc. The bread and wine are fundamentally for the banquet, to take us to the Passover.¹¹ The real presence in them is always the means to take us to an end that is to fulfill the Passover in us. Jesus Christ is present in function of the Paschal Mystery.

The presence of Jesus Christ is the chariot of fire that comes to take us to glory, to make us pass from death to resurrection, to really makes us enter into death and resurrection. The Eucharist is dynamic, it gets us moving. We had transformed it into something that is static and that we can manipulate for our devotions.

All the values of contemplation and adoration proper to the Eucharist, that not only aren't alien to the celebration of the paschal banquet but are a fundamental part of it, need to be recovered, especially within the Mass, keeping the worship of the Eucharist outside the Mass but intimately connected to and secondary to it. Even if there are people who are scandalized, for example, when the Church recommends that "the tabernacle be placed in a chapel separate from the main body of the church." (Eucharisticum mysterium, n.53) I remember a priest from Avila who said: "Even if the Pope himself orders me, I won't take away the tabernacle..."

Look, instead, at what the Church says officially:

In the celebration of Mass the principle modes of worship by which Christ is present to his Church are gradually revealed. First of all, Christ is seen to be present among the faithful gathered in his name; then in his Word, as the Scriptures are read and explained; in the person of the minister; finally and in a unique way (modo singulari) under the species of the Eucharist. Consequently, because of the sign [see how the signs are recovered] it is more in keeping with the nature of the celebration that the Eucharistic presence of Christ, which is the fruit of the consecration and should be seen as such, should not be on the altar from the very beginning of Mass through the

¹¹ On the Eucharist as the Paschal banquet, on Communion and its fruits, refer to CCC 1382-1401:

CCC 1390: Since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species; communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace. For pastoral reasons this manner of receiving communion has been legitimately established as the most common form in the Latin rite. But "Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet more clearly evident" (GIRM 281). This is the usual form of receiving communion in the Eastern rites.

reservation of the sacred species in the tabernacle.
(Eucharisticum mysterium, n. 55)

Adoration and contemplation are specific to the Passover, to the Eucharist, but above all within the celebration not as something separate. For what happens in many Masses now, with all the guitars and folk music, is not good because there is no space for adoration and contemplation. They are values intrinsic to the celebration and we have detached them to make them into private devotions.

The liturgical renewal began with the rediscovery of the Paschal Mystery. You might remember that the first thing to be renewed was the Passover Vigil, restored by Pius XII before the Council. It is, in fact, the feast of feasts of Christianity. Before the Council there was the renewal of Holy Week.

For we had almost reduced the celebration of the Paschal Mystery to a re-living, more theatrical and sentimental than sacramental, of the historical facts of the passion and death of the Lord. The Passover had been diluted into holy hours, Ways of the Cross, processions etc. The importance of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday had grown but we had lost precisely the paschal night, the Paschal Vigil. I still remember when Easter was celebrated on Saturday morning in completely empty churches because people were at work.

This is why the liturgical renewal was started in 1955 by bringing the Passover into the foreground and recovering the Paschal Vigil as the center of all the Christian liturgy, as mother of all feasts and source of all Eucharists.

(Kiko)

Maybe someone will say: What on earth are they saying here? That everything before was a mistake?

Pay attention: the Second Vatican Council has said that catechesis have to be given to explain the renewal to the people, because a true liturgical renewal cannot be carried out without seriously initiating the people to the liturgy. Otherwise, people are shocked and scandalized or they get used, on the outside, to the changes but without changing their interior way of living the liturgy. This isn't the spirit of the Church and of the Council. The Council has spoken of the need to catechize people to explain the renewal.

This is very difficult to do. There are people who immediately think: if they're changing things now, it means that before they were mistaken; so they cheated me; why did they make me do things in that way if it was wrong? They should have changed things earlier! In fact, as many people live Christianity at a very infantile level, very much as a natural religion, because they haven't been sufficiently catechized (natural religion is based on a kind of verticality, in which the sacred comes down directly from heaven and cannot be touched; in which the proof that something comes from God is precisely its untouchability), what they say is: if something can be changed, it means that God has made a mistake and so religion is false! At first sight this may seem an exaggeration

but basically it is what more than a few people thought about the liturgical renewal of the Council.

All this happens because we don't understand that truth, God's revelation, is manifested, is made explicit through signs. And as we men are historical beings and live in history that is always changing, so the external expression of God's manifestation also changes. The very language of people changes. If a twentieth century man were to speak the Italian of the 16th century, everyone would laugh at him.

We see in the Bible how God has progressively spiritualized and purified the liturgy of Israel, from sacrifices of goats and cows to the Passover that Jesus Christ celebrated with his apostles. There was a great evolution of the rites in Israel. In the time of Jesus Christ, the center of the liturgy is no longer the temple but the family feast of the Passover vigil. God, through the exile, the prophets, the synagogue, etc., brought the liturgical spirituality of the people of Israel to the sacrifice of praise of the paschal celebration.

Carmen has explained how the pagan sacrificial ideas that Israel had had and had left behind, then crept back again into the Christian Eucharist. Was it that God, like a kind of Moloch, was placated and satisfied with the sacrifice, with the blood of his Son? If so, what sort of God have we made for ourselves? We have arrived at thinking that God, like the pagan gods, satisfies his anger with the sacrifice of his Son. This is why it is normal for the atheists to say: what kind of God is this who discharges his anger against his Son on the cross? And what could we answer? Certain juridical and clumsy rationalizations of the theology of expiation and the Eucharist have brought us to these deformations, to believing in a God whose ruthless justice would have demanded a human sacrifice, the immolation of his own Son.

But things are not like this. God in Christ, says St. Paul, was reconciling the world to himself (see 2 Cor 5:19). Not because Christ placated God's ruthless anger, but because he was showing men that he loves us in spite of our sin. God wanted to show us that even if we killed his Son, he continued to love us. God was reconciling the world to himself through Jesus Christ. It's the world that needed to discover God's love.

This catechesis can't be given in one day or even two. That's why we will start a long way that will take years, where we'll go on discovering and deepening our understanding of this wonder. I assure you that the renewal of the Second Vatican Council will lead the Church to an indescribable glory and will fill the Eastern Church and the Protestants with wonder and admiration. We shall all sit down together on the corner stone, on the rock in which there are no divisions. The Council is ecumenical.

God loves his Church that walks with real men who are weak and sinners. But God will not allow the gates of hell to prevail against his Church (see Mt 16:18), even if he allows sin, so that it may be seen, as St. Paul says, that we carry a priceless treasure in earthen vessels (see 2 Cor 4:7): for it is God who

does the work with weak instruments, not through people who are faultless.

The messes that have occurred in the Church's history show us one thing: that we men have tried hard to destroy the Church and have not succeeded. We, men of the Church, have done everything possible to overthrow it. The fact that the Church exists today is one of the greatest miracles there is.

Where is the Council's renewal heading? Towards the removal of all the additions that have hidden the treasure of the Passover and that the Holy Spirit allowed in particular historic circumstances.

Through the centuries, the Holy Spirit has brought the Church to respond to concrete circumstances that have arisen. For instance, it could be asked why God allowed the introit, the offertory or all those pagan ideas about sacrifice to enter the Mass. Because the Church had to take on a very important historical challenge: uncatechized masses of people entered the Church, people who were not Jews, who came from their pagan temples where they had carried out their rites and feasts, for all peoples have always been religious. What was the Church to do with all these people? Accept this reality and little by little try to transform this pagan mentality into Christianity. And how did she do this? By Christianizing their feasts and their rites.

Rejoice, because tonight we're going to celebrate a wonderful Eucharist as renewed by the Council. I remember the Masses that I attended when I was a child in Madrid in the parish of Good Success: you were there for ten minutes, a little bell rung and we knelt down for the consecration; straight away the bell rang again and seven minutes after that the man beside me made the sign of the cross which meant that Mass was over. Remember when we didn't listen to the Word of God because it was in Latin. There was no homily; no prayer of the faithful; no kiss of peace; no anaphora in the vernacular; few people went to communion; only the priest drank from the chalice; etc. We have all experienced this. Read your answers to this morning's questionnaire to see what you thought about the Mass.

Tonight we're going to celebrate the Eucharist with the Word of God in abundance. The Council put three readings. Maybe some people will get tired and say: what a bore! Of course: in natural religion it's a question of fulfilling the obligation so the quicker the better. Think, on the other hand, of those Christians who gave their lives to go to a Eucharist on a Sunday. The martyrs of Bythinia, for example, were burned for going to Mass and knowing they would be killed if they went. And Pliny's report to Trajan who had ordered him to investigate what the Christians were doing says: I skinned men, I tortured the old, I did everything possible. The only thing I found out was that they meet before dawn, have a communal meal and follow someone called Crestos. He doesn't even say Christ. Of course Christians gave their lives for the Eucharist! It was the center of their lives! And we get bored...

We're going to celebrate the Eucharist tonight, Saturday. Today the Jews still celebrate their feasts from vespers to

vespers. Before Jesus Christ the seventh day was Saturday and for the Jews the rite of Shabbat begins on Friday at 5 p.m. and lasts until sunset on Saturday. Jesus Christ rose on the night between Saturday and Sunday and with him the feast for the Christians passed to the Sunday or the day of the Lord (called the first day of the week by the Jews and the day of the sun by the Romans). For the Church too the liturgical celebration of Sunday begins at sunset on Saturday, with first vespers. The first Christians met on the night between Saturday and Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist. Later, after the Peace of Constantine (313), when Sunday became also a civil holiday, they began to celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday mornings too.

The liturgical renewal of the Council has recovered the ancient tradition of celebrating the Eucharist of the Lord's Day beginning on Saturday evening.

As in the Church, the center of the liturgy in the Neocatechumenal Way will be the Passover Vigil. We will recover the sign of the night that was lost, the sign of the vigil that waits for day to come. (In the Preconium the deacon sang: may the morning star find this flame still burning... and at half-past eight in the evening we were off into the street again.)

The early Church's whole spirituality stemmed from this night. This night on which Christ rose, holy night, sacramental night, the memorial night of Jesus Christ risen, the night of nights, is the center of the liturgy.

On this night, preferably, the Christians were baptized because on this night God brought salvation to completion; this night the Spirit raised Jesus Christ from death. On this night the first Christians waited for the second coming of the Lord. And as a prolongation of this core, of the paschal night, they celebrated the Eucharist of the Lord's Day on Saturday night.

In the community you will celebrate, as we will do today, the Eucharist of the Lord's Day in a great feast, preferably on Saturday night for various reasons: for the pedagogical richness which links the Eucharist with the Paschal Vigil; because we will teach you to celebrate the domestic liturgy of Lauds with your children on Sunday morning, during which you will pass the faith to them; because the fact that the Lord's day Eucharist is celebrated on Saturday night means that many young people who join the communities willingly give up going to parties, dances, discotheques, to make Passover with the Lord; because it is a time when parish priests and presbyters, very busy on a Sunday, are freer, etc.

We'll have an abundant Word, with a homily, the prayer of the faithful, the kiss of peace, etc. After the peace, we'll have the anaphora. I hope that he who is presiding will sing with charism, with all his strength. You'll see that it's a wonderful theology, a song to God for the wonders he is doing with each one of us. We will all reply "Amen" to the anaphora. We will take communion with the two species, the bread which is the Body of Jesus Christ given up to death for us and the wine, which is his Blood of the new and eternal covenant.

INTERVAL of an hour

Convivence: Saturday

EUCCHARIST at 7:30 p.m.

DINNER at 9:30 p.m.

After dinner you can have a bit of a party. It shouldn't go on too long because there is a lot to do the next day. It would be good to finish by midnight.

SUNDAY

LAUDS at 10 a.m. (*outdoors, if possible*)

MONITION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Mt 5-7)

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The beatitudes (1716 - 1717); the desire for happiness (1718-1719); Christian beatitude (1729-1729); the Sermon on the Mount (577, 1724, 1965, 1966, 1968, 2153, 2262, 2336, 2608, 2763, 2764, 2830, 2841); the new law or the law of the Gospel (1965-1973, 1975-1986); love and forgiveness of enemies (1825, 2262, 1933, 1968, 2608, 2814, 2862).

(Kiko)

Today is a day projected towards the future. Projected on us, but looking forward. Usually, in all the convivences, when we reach this point, which is one of the most important things in the convivence, we go out into the open, into nature. We have tried to do this today but it is bitterly cold. It's a pity because from here we can see a wonderful landscape. But if we go outside we risk dying of cold. This is why we have to do it indoors. Why to look for a place in the midst of nature? Because now we will proclaim the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount, which perhaps many of you have never in your lives heard in its entirety, is a sermon that is recorded in full in the Gospel of St. Matthew. I'm going to say some things about this sermon.

First thing: don't defend yourself in front of the Word of God, don't try to defend yourself in front of this Word, which certainly will denounce you. Don't try to find that deep down you are fulfilling this Word. Because you don't fulfill this Word, because if you were fulfilling this Word, you wouldn't be here. The Word that we shall proclaim is the joyful announcement of the Kingdom of God. It is the drawing, the photograph of the new man, the man whom the Holy Spirit is going to make of you, gratis.

This Sermon on the Mount presents several difficulties. The first problem is to consider it a law, which we have to fulfill with clenched fists, with effort. Try not to add palliatives to the Word. Don't put oil on the Word so that it can slide away. Listen to the Word in all its scandal, just as the primitive Church transmits and gives it to us.

What we will hear is a whole catechesis for catechumens close to be baptized. This Word has been preceded by the announcement of the kerygma, by the Church beginning to donate the Holy Spirit and by works of faith.

The Church has passed on to us this Word in the Gospel of St. Matthew and hasn't tried to sweeten it. All the Gospel contains a catechetical reality, a series of facts that took place in the small Christian communities over many years.

This picture of the new man was put together by the primitive Church as the fruit of the kerygma in us. It is the

works performed by the Christians who have received the Holy Spirit. It's precisely because these works were performed, that they could be narrated, transmitted, as the great good news for the catechumens who wanted to enter the Church.

This Word isn't a law. Because the law doesn't save, the law condemns, since the law always puts man in front of his sin. If this Word were a law it would demand yet another effort, a final effort, to go hard at it. But it is impossible for the old man, the man of the flesh,¹ to fulfill this sermon. In this sermon we really shall hear everything: this new man who doesn't judge, who doesn't love money more than God, who doesn't resist evil, who, when struck on the left cheek, offers the right one, who, if someone wants to rob him of something, doesn't stop him, who doesn't resist evil, (not evil in general but the concrete evil which his wife does to him at home, or the husband or the children or what they do to him at work), if someone forces him unjustly, just imagine today, in this era of justice and dissent, how these words sound, to walk for one mile under a heavy load until he cannot take it anymore, he walks two miles: he doesn't do only what they justly demand but also what they unjustly oblige him and twice as much!

To try to make of this a law to be fulfilled with one's strength is absurd. To try to make of this a law for society is absurd. How could society not resist evil? It would be the triumph of thieves and murderers! (In this sense, Christianity is revolutionary.) The Sermon on the Mount cannot be applied from above as a law without taming it and taking away all its force and transforming it into a utopia, into an unattainable ideal. And so in the Church we have transformed it into evangelical counsels for very pure and perfect people. But it isn't like this. This sermon is written for all Christians,² also for the ones that are married with children, etc. because at the time when this Gospel was written, religious did not yet exist.

¹ CCC 1972: The New Law is called a *law of love* because it makes us act out of the love infused by the Holy Spirit, rather than from fear; a *law of grace*, because it confers the strength of grace to act, by means of faith and the sacraments; a *law of freedom*, because it sets us free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Old Law, inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity and, finally, lets us pass from the condition of a servant who "does not know what his master is doing" to that of a friend of Christ -- "For all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" -- or even to the status of son and heir (Jn 15:15; cf. Jas 1:25; 2:12; Gal 4:1-7. 21-31; Rom 8:15).

² CCC 1967: The Law of the Gospel "fulfills," refines, surpasses and leads the Old Law to its perfection (see Mt 5:17-19). In the Beatitudes, the New Law *fulfills* the divine promises by elevating and orienting them toward the "kingdom of heaven." It is addressed to those open to accepting this new hope with faith - the poor, the humble, the afflicted, the pure of heart, those persecuted on account of Christ -- and so marks out the surprising ways of the Kingdom.

In front of the Sermon on the Mount there are not first and second class Christians, the officers and the troops; simply there are Christians in whom either the fulfillment of the Word of God is given, or simply you are not Christian.

This new man loves the enemy³ and doesn't resist evil, he doesn't judge, he doesn't desire the wife of his neighbor. But not as a law that you must fulfill with your own strength. It is not that you must love your enemy or that you must let yourself be killed, nor you must let yourself be destroyed: you, clenching your fists." For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:7-8).

It is true that in you a seed of new life has begun to spring up. The Holy Spirit is beginning to be given to you. But this shoot of new life, through the catechumenate, will grow and will be seen, because the man of the Spirit, the man who is born from heaven does works of eternal life, fulfills the Sermon on the Mount. Those who have begun to do them will be able to renew their baptism. There is no place here for traps, or tricks, or

³ CCC 1825: Christ died out of love for us, while we were still "enemies" (Rom 5:10). The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our enemies, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away and to love children and the poor as Christ himself (see Mt 5:44; Lk 10:27-37; Mk 9:37; Mt 25:40, 45). The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: "charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude; Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:4-7).

CCC 1968: The Law of the Gospel *fulfills* the commandments of the Law. The Lord's Sermon on the Mount, far from abolishing or devaluing the moral prescriptions of the Old Law, releases their hidden potential and has new demands arise from them: it reveals their entire divine and human truth. It does not add new external precepts, but proceeds to reform the heart, the root of human acts, where man chooses between the pure and the impure (see Mt 15:18-19), where faith, hope and charity are formed and with them the other virtues. The Gospel thus brings the Law to its fullness through imitation of the perfection of the heavenly Father, through forgiveness of enemies and prayer for persecutors, in emulation of the divine generosity (see Mt 5:44, 48).

⁴ CCC 2763: All the Scriptures -- the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms -- are fulfilled in Christ (see Lk 24:44). The Gospel is this "Good News." Its first proclamation is summarized by St. Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5-7).⁵ CCC 521: Christ enables us to *live in him* all that he himself lived and *he lives it in us*. By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man" (GS 22). We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model.

false mysticism, or stupidities. There are works which are works of eternal life, which only Jesus Christ risen from death can do and he who has received the spirit of the risen Christ, because they are works of God on earth, because they are the signs, in front of the world, of the fact that we are born from God: that we do the works of God. Whoever does the works of God is born from God and is a child of God; who doesn't do them doesn't know God because "God is love" (see 1 Jn 3:9-10; 4:1-21) 3,9-10; 4,1-21).

So, don't listen to this sermon as a law that you have to fulfill only with your strength.

Second: don't listen to this Word trying to adapt it, defending yourself from it, trying to take away all its scandal, because it will scandalize you and will denounce you.

Jesus Christ speaks, in a certain sense, scandalizing and says: who has ears to hear, let him hear. Brothers and sisters, listen to it as a Good News,⁴ as a Word which comes out, proclaimed from here, from this small lectern and which goes straight from here to look for someone among you who wants to keep it, who wants to welcome it. It will come down like a dove on the one who welcomes it, will be kept safe in him and will become real in him.⁵

This Word proclaimed here is searching for the one who wants to welcome it, who wants to keep it. Let he who welcomes this Word, welcome it with joy and happiness, let him welcome it as a promise, as a prophetic Word, as a Word of God. Precisely because it is Word of God, it is a prophetic Word: it always fulfills what it announces in the one who welcomes it. This Word announces one thing: that it will be fulfilled in you. You have been called by God to be keepers of this Word, so that this Word may bring you to its fulfillment, may truly lead you to its realization. As in Mary who, having welcomed the Word, the announcement of the angel and believed in it, the Word immediately began to realize itself in her.

Do not listen to this Word in a moralistic way, as if it were a law, or defending yourselves from it because it scandalizes you and so you try to adapt it to your concrete

⁴ CCC 2763: All the Scriptures -- the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms -- are fulfilled in Christ (see Lk 24:44). The Gospel is this "Good News." Its first proclamation is summarized by St. Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5-7).⁵ CCC 521: Christ enables us to *live in him* all that he himself lived and *he lives it in us*. By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man" (GS 22). We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model.

⁵ CCC 521: Christ enables us to *live in him* all that he himself lived and *he lives it in us*. By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man" (GS 22). We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model.

situation. Welcome it well disposed, in all its freshness, in all its beauty, in all its wonder, without touching it, without adulterating it.

Welcome it as a Good News. Because this Word is the photograph of Jesus Christ risen,⁶ alive in the man who has believed in him. Because this Jesus Christ, sent by the Father and raised up from death, to whom has been given the Holy Spirit who will renew the earth, has to be believed in, must be welcomed. He who believes that God can transform his heart and change his selfish, proud heart - who is violent towards all those who are not as he wants and spends his life punching his neighbor in the face - into a new heart: let him welcome this Word. This Word is for the poor, for the weak, for those sunk in vice, for those who have no will power, for the proud, for the sinners, for you and for me.⁷

Don't think that this is something utopian. It isn't utopian that you will also give your trousers to the one who takes your jacket; on the contrary, it is true that you will give them to him if you believe and welcome this Word. And if you don't believe this, you are one too many here, you don't have to stay here. Because the only thing that we are stating here and now is that this new man, Jesus Christ in us, is the only one who saves the world; he is the one who puts an end to the wars on the earth, who doesn't destroy children in Vietnam, who doesn't throw napalm bombs, who really and authentically loves men, who loves the enemy, who transforms this cosmos, who does the true, total and authentic politics.

For it has been prophesied that the Servant of Yahweh, Jesus Christ, will teach justice to the nations (see Is 42:1). Because we don't believe that mysticism or religiosity on the one hand

⁶ CCC 1717: The Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity. They express the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of his Passion and Resurrection; they shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations; they proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured, however dimly, for Christ's disciples; they have begun in the lives of the Virgin Mary and all the saints.

CCC 1065: Jesus Christ himself is the "Amen" (Rev 3:14). He is the definitive "Amen" of the Father's love for us. He takes up and completes our "Amen" to the Father: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God" (2 Cor 1:20): Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, God, for ever and ever. AMEN.⁷ CCC 1725: The Beatitudes take up and fulfill God's promises from Abraham on by ordering them to the Kingdom of heaven. They respond to the desire for happiness that God has placed in the human heart.

⁷ CCC 1725: The Beatitudes take up and fulfill God's promises from Abraham on by ordering them to the Kingdom of heaven. They respond to the desire for happiness that God has placed in the human heart.

and politics on the other may exist. Only one reality exists: a new man who comes into the world to transform the earth, to save the world.

This new man is Jesus Christ, our Lord, that Jesus of Nazareth whom we men have killed and whom God has resurrected from the dead, has raised up and exalted. This is the new man who is promised to you who are here and are about to begin a catechumenal way; this is the new man who appears prophetically on the horizon for you today. He is a man towards whom we all are walking. Anyone who will not have him and who will not begin to do his same works will not be able to renew his Baptism.

Because Jesus says: Without me you can do nothing (see Jn 15:5). And he also says: Either with me or against me. Whoever does not reap with me, scatters (see Mt 12:30). We are convinced that only Jesus Christ saves the world. He, whom God has exalted and constituted *Kyrios* over all realities, over every power of this world.

This Jesus has received from God every power and he has been constituted Lord over all powers, principalities, virtues, authorities and dominations. Over everything that has power in this world, God has constituted Jesus Christ as Lord. He is the truth. He who sees Jesus, sees God. St. Paul says: In him God was reconciling the world to himself, because he is God (see 2 Cor 5:19).

Perhaps many of you who are here don't want to accept that this man is God, that he is the truth. I won't hear of it! What? I must suffer injustice? Who says so? No one is going to touch me!

Instead yes, brother, if you don't accept this, you are one too many here. No one is forcing and is ordering you to stay here. And we are not worried to have many people. Seven people are enough, ten, eight, three, whatever they may be, those in whom Jesus is living and risen so that they may be a milestone, a new reality, making present that the Kingdom of God has arrived on earth. The Kingdom of God is there where the risen Christ reigns, above envy, above pride, above hatred, above the existing concerns for money. You will hear that you cannot serve God and money because you can't serve two masters.⁸ You will be told how you should pray. The Sermon on the Mount is the great sermon. It is the greatest sermon ever given in the world.

⁸ CCC 2830: The Father who gives us life cannot not but give us the nourishment life requires - all appropriate goods and blessings, both material and spiritual. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus insists on the filial trust that cooperates with our Father's Providence (see Mt 6:25,34). He is not inviting us to idleness (see 2Ts 3:6,13), but wants to relieve us from nagging worry and preoccupation. Such is the filial surrender of the children of God: "To those who seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he has promised to give all else besides. Since everything indeed belongs to God, he who possesses God wants for nothing, if he himself is not found wanting before God" (St. Cyprian, *De Dom. orat.* 21).

You must believe that in fact you will love God more than money. At the moment you have no strength, but it will be given to you, for the Holy Spirit will be given to you so that you can do it. Because we shall take the Gospel seriously. Perhaps up to now we have taken it as a game, we have reduced it to going to Mass, to not stealing, to not killing... We shall take seriously that Jesus is risen, that God has looked upon this man and has raised him up above all things and constituted him our Lord; He has given him the Spirit so that he may give it to us, that He has made him life-giving Spirit able to transform us all.

I finish by telling you what the angel announced to Mary: a new man. A seed is beginning to be born within you, the seed of a new creature. A new creature that is the son of God. This new creature is the one who saves the world. You will bring to the world the salvation of Jesus Christ, you will transform this earth. All of you here are invited to this new man, to this man who will be born in you. This child is born from heaven, from on high. He isn't born from your clenched fists, or from your efforts. He is born from the fruit of the blood of Jesus shed for our sins, so that they may be forgiven and we may receive new life, a new Spirit, we may receive the nature of God.

Brothers and sisters, let us listen to this sermon, this Word which has come out of the mouth of God, this Word which gives eternal life.

Jesus says: Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (see Mt 4:4). The Word, which comes out of the mouth of God, is life, is eternal life for you.

(It is good that this Word be proclaimed by one of the participants to the convivence, because it seems to us that in this way it has more strength. So look for someone who can proclaim it well: who could do it with authority. If you don't find anybody able to, let one of you do it).

(Leave half an hour for personal prayer and meditation during which everyone can go where he likes, in silence, reading the Word again. Then, when everyone has gathered again, finish Lauds.)

BREAK

CATECHESIS ON THE SERVANT OF YAHWEH (I) at 12:30 p.m.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The condition of Servant (461, 472, 713, 2716); the mission of the suffering Servant (440, 536, 539, 555, 786, 1551); "God made him sin for us" (601-605); obedient unto death (411, 475, 532, 539, 612, 615, 624, 908, 1009); Christ offered himself to his Father for our sins (606-623); the way of faith (165, 684, 964, 972, 1229, 1697, 1785, 2609).

(Kiko)

This evening we will meet, divided by parish and each one will say whether he wants to continue this way or not. This evening you will be asked also to give your experience of the catechesis. Those who want to continue will begin a serious way towards adult faith.

Now I shall explain why we are doing this way, what is the MISSION OF THIS WAY AND WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH. First of all I will try to sum up the catechesis which we have given you during this time.

In these catecheses, which end with this convivence, we have not claimed to exhaust the theme. Nor have we expected that you understand everything rationally with absolute clarity, because this is impossible. Even more, he who wants to fit God into his reason doesn't want to abandon himself to Him. Nothing happens if someone goes away. We are not anxious to make proselytes. There are many of you here, but even if you were half or a quarter the number we would be just as happy. This is not the problem, but that salt may exist, that in the stew there may be some salt, enough salt to salt the potatoes, the chickpeas and the rest.

So what did we want to do? We just wanted to open a window and show you a beautiful panorama. From the window you can see a mountain in the distance, a beautiful lake, different things. But we are in the house. On the horizon there is the mountain and in the distance you can see a beautiful land, which we will reach. Now it is a matter of starting out on the way. What we wanted to do up to now has been to make you see this panorama. Now what matters is to do this way. We must set out on the journey.

To present the way to you we have spoken about this tripod on which all the catechumenate is based; this tripod on which the whole life of the Christian is based: WORD, LITURGY and CHARITY (Community).

We have given you a Word, a little bit more alive, a little bit - because we are neither orators nor experts. The Word that we have announced you is the kerygma, the Good News. We have seen this Good News through Abraham and the Exodus, understanding how it was prepared by a whole history of salvation.

We have begun to answer to this Word with some liturgies: a penitential celebration, with more sense of community, a bit more alive, not a rite done out of routine, a celebration of the

Word in which the Bible was handed over to you; and yesterday we celebrated a Eucharist, that too with more sense of community and rediscovering the signs.

Through small agapes and this convivence we have tried to create among us the beginnings of communion even though, since we are so many, it is difficult. However, there is an atmosphere, we see concrete faces and we are not an anonymous crowd, but concrete people.

We tried to make you taste the Word as a cake, instead of giving you the recipe. We have tried to make you taste this cake, because afterwards you will have to go on eating it. We have given you a kind of appetizer. Starting from now the meal begins. This meal will be a catechumenate that lasts years. Don't be afraid! There are communities which have already been in the way for many years and the brothers and sisters are still there happy, because the Word is being fulfilled in them. When these brothers and sisters look back at the day of the initial convivence, they see that it is far away now. They don't say: How well I was then! But rather: What a fool I was then, when I didn't understand anything and everything seemed to me very difficult! Now it is marvelous. A sister from a community in Madrid was saying this to me the other day, that at the convivence everything seemed impossible to her, with her husband, her children, her problems; now instead... because it is God who has done it.

Because we assure you that God is here. If God does not act, everything is useless. If God does not call you to live this particular way of faith and doesn't give you the gifts needed to go on with it, it probably means that you are called to take another road, among the many itineraries that there are in the Church, to develop your faith and make it grow.

The fact is that people continue to come to the community and yet we did not say to anybody: you must commit yourself. You have never heard me saying anything like that. Here we don't say to anyone: give me your word that you will commit yourself. Yet the people come. Why? Because they find something.

When you do not find anything, go away from here. Why waste time? In life there are wonderful and very important things and time is money. Why should we waste time here with a handful of bigots who read the Bible? If you come, we suppose that you do so because you find something.

Before going on, I would like to read you something which is good news for us. The press has published the documents of the 2nd General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on *The ministerial priesthood and justice in the world* (1971), that deals with topics that are very relevant today and which are of great concern to us. Here is a text which is of interest to us:

Let the presbyters, conscious of their mission of reconciling all men in the love of Christ and attentive to the dangers of schisms, put every interest, with much prudence and pastoral charity, into the formation of communities animated by apostolic zeal, which may make present everywhere

*the missionary Spirit of the Church. These small communities, which do not oppose the parochial or diocesan structure, must be so inserted into a parochial or diocesan community, to be like the leaven of the missionary spirit among them...*⁹

This is a text on Christian communities within the parish, promulgated by the Synod. It means that we are on the right track.

This text is important because today there are many types of community, of which several are outside the parish structure because they say that the parish structure is out-of-date and no longer has any meaning. We have fought a lot with these groups because we want to do this way within the parish structure. This document of the Church supports us with regard to this.

In the first catechesis we made a short analysis of the situation of the Church and we have looked at three things: a process of desacralization, a process of dechristianization and a crisis of faith. All this is happening inside the Church.

We said that desacralization is the loss of the tremendous mystery that God is within the life of man and gives him existence; it is the loss of the sense of the sacred. We were saying that this was happening within the Church before the Council, when the Church, in her missionary impulse of answering to the new sociological reality in which we are living (a post-war reality which has given rise to a situation of anomie, in which the norms have fallen, the law, in which a whole series of values lose their meaning) has been catechized by the world which she wanted to catechize.

We have spoken of the extraordinary technological development which has caused two types of man to appear in Europe: the nihilist man and the socialist man. A nihilist type of man: nihilist because he doesn't believe in anything, a man who became adult, who no longer appeals to natural religion to explain a whole series of things and who accepts the human contingency of being a man who did not exist, who today exists and who tomorrow will no longer exist. What matters to this man is only to work, to make money. He has a car and on Saturdays and Sundays he goes to the country, he hates the city in which he lives, full of pollution and traffic jams. He is a man who is fundamentally pragmatic, with a strong sense of efficiency. A man who is totally secularized. He is a man who believes in science, who has no need of religion, but who, however, needs the new "priests" of the secularized society: the psychiatrists.

We said that the Church, trying to respond to this type of man who depends upon science and techniques, trying to bring the Christian message to him, has herself depended on science and techniques, trying to translate her message into scientific terminology.

But when we realized it, we had paid a very high price: within the Church a process of desacralization had taken place.

⁹ *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol.IV, Bologna ¹³1985, p.778, n.1190.

At the end, instead of being us who catechized them, they catechized us.

Apart from this nihilist man, who no longer comes to Church, who believes in his work, a fairly honest man who no longer believes in ideologies, another type of man appeared. A kind of man that has projected all his religiosity on to the socio-political field in an effort to change this world, because he believes that this world, a product of a post-war situation, traumatized by two world wars, can be changed through political struggle and the change of structures. He is the Marxist and socialist man. He is an organized man who has made a religion out of his credo, out of his vision of the world.

Also in front of this second type of man, this socialist man, the Church has made an effort to copy his techniques too. In answer to the cells of workers' revolutionary action, we too created our cells of Catholic workers action; in answer to them, we too organized our struggle.

But, again, we have been catechized by them. At the center of some of our groups we did not put the risen Christ but socio-political action instead. And when we realized this we had already moved to the other side, we had become Marxists, as happened to the Catholic workers action groups. Here too we have witnessed a process of desacralization.

We are at a very important historical moment in which the masses are leaving the Church. Historically, this is very important just as in its time there was the opposite phenomenon when the nations entered into the Church after the peace of Constantine. Using an expression of Congar this parenthesis which was opened after Constantine is beginning to close today. The nations are leaving the Church. This will help her to abandon certain philosophies of hers, certain socio-political connivances, of living faith very much at the level of natural religion, so that Christianity may shine in all its freshness and originality.

More than a process of secularization there is a process of dechristianization. Many Christians that come our temples live a very infantile Christianity, very much at the level of natural religion, because they haven't been catechized enough. This can be seen in the fact that they don't do works of eternal life, that they live a strong divorce between religion and life.

We have also spoken about a crisis of faith that is today present in the world because the signs of adult faith are not given with sufficient clarity.

In other times, in a religious world that accepted the idea of God, the Church gave the signs of love by looking after abandoned children, setting up schools, setting up hospitals for the incurably sick. There were religious orders whose work was to ransom slaves etc. In every epoch the Church has tried to give signs and in different periods the Spirit has caused charisms to arise so that the signs of love might be given, so that men could see Jesus Christ working in their midst. The cathedrals are signs, the great churches, etc. Men who accepted the existence of God could be brought to maturity through an education of religiosity, of prayer, of going to church, etc.

People accepted the sacraments and nobody questioned the idea of God.

Today the world is secularized and a sacramental pastoral work is insufficient because many people no longer go to the sacraments because they don't believe; they no longer go to church because they don't believe; they don't go to pray before the tabernacle because they don't believe, etc. Moreover, society is becoming adult and is increasingly taking on the responsibility of opening hospitals, schools, etc.

So what must we do?

WE NEED TO CREATE SIGNS OF ADULT FAITH that call every man to faith, the secularized man, the technical man; the man who walks alongside us in the street and whom we all know, signs that lead him to faith.

The signs of adult faith are those which make explicit reference to the kerygma, to the paschal mystery of our Lord Jesus, to the great mystery which is Christ risen from death, conqueror of death for us, they are the signs that call men to faith: LOVE IN THE DIMENSION OF THE CROSS AND UNITY.

You remember that we said that love in the dimension of the cross is the unequivocal sign of Jesus Christ. Agape, loving the other more than yourself, charity, wanting the good of the other, this charity which is patient, which is not envious, which is not boastful, which does not get angry, which believes everything, which puts up with everything, which excuses everything (see 1 Cor 13:1-7) is possible only in the person who has the Spirit of the risen Christ. And if this happens on earth, it is a sign that God has come down on earth. Without any doubt this love makes Jesus Christ present because only in him this love has been given. Because he was God.

Jesus has transmitted his Spirit to the Church, to the Christians, the Spirit which makes us brothers and sisters, adopted children of God, the Spirit which has overcome death and allows us to love the brother in a dimension in which no man on earth can love, because to love in this dimension you must have overcome death, to be lords over death, to have more power than death. Through the Church, through Christians, this Spirit, victor over death, makes Jesus Christ present in the world and through Jesus Christ, makes the Father present.

If you know anybody else who has more power than death, tell me; because we confess that the one who has overcome death, the one who was rescued from death, is Jesus Christ risen who has been constituted Lord of death.

Men could give up their lives for their fatherland, for some political ideal, for a career, for something which builds them up, for something which gives them happiness and pleasure. But no one can give up his life for what destroys him, for what denies his being. No man can give his life for the enemy. No one can love what is worthless, what is good for nothing. Christianity is based precisely on this: on the fact that Jesus gave his life for us, not when we were his friends, but when we were his enemies.

St. Paul says: Someone can give his life for a good man, the head of the state, for a poet, for someone who has children... but who gives his life for the proud one, for the filthy bourgeois, for the murderer, for the person who should be gotten rid of? Who will give his life for him? (see Rom 5:6-8).

Psalm 21, which Jesus Christ recited on the cross, recounts his miseries: They have pierced my hands and my feet, my bones can all be counted, a pack of bulls, with mouths open like lions to devour me, surrounds me, everybody looks at me triumphantly and they laugh at me, wagging their heads. I am thrown down to the ground like dirty water being poured away. My heart is melting like wax, my entrails are burning, my tongue is swollen, my mouth is dry like a potsherd, etc. But then he concludes saying: Praise the Lord, house of Jacob; glorify God, you people of Israel. Do you know why he says this? Because God is the only one who was not disgusted by this wretch.

There where humanity said: Kill him! He is an impostor who does not deserve to live. There where everybody said: He is lustful and an adulterer, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and prostitutes, a hypocrite and a deceiver, a traitor to the fatherland, to the most holy ideals. There where all men said: Get rid of him... God was not disgusted by him. God loved him.

We were in Jesus. That is why the news that we give you is that God loves you whatever you are: a sinner, lustful, lascivious, bourgeois, lazy, selfish, always looking for your own advantage, always seeking your own interests, who accepts others only when they build you up, or help you, who consider yourself the king of the world. God loves you like this; he loves you even though you are a sinner, even though you are an enemy.

This is the love which Jesus Christ had, the Spirit which brought him to love men to the limit of giving his life, answering evil with good, letting himself be killed, respecting others as they are, not judging men even though he was the Judge because he is God, understanding men up to the point of saying to those who wanted to kill him: You can kill me, I forgive you and I continue to love you.

All of us do the opposite: we spend our lives judging everything and everybody and trying to change everybody.

From this murder which we have committed against him, God draws out our salvation. From the fact that we killed Jesus Christ, he has drawn out our redemption. He who has experienced this, how can he not raise a *beraka*, an exultation, a Eucharist, a blessing to God?

The day that you will really experience this you will really be able to celebrate a true Eucharist. That is why there is no Christian who is not a theologian, who does not sing an exultant song celebrating the marvels of God, the events which God has made him know. For the Holy Spirit is like a spring in us which never stops spouting, which never stops announcing to you the marvels of the love of God for you. When this theology is not present, there is neither Spirit nor Christianity and so we need big books to fill us up really well.

This love is a sign for the world; and it has to be given. But today, where is this love? Where is this love which is the sign of God himself among men, of the Holy Spirit?

The second sign is UNITY. Jesus says: Love one another as I have loved you because in this love everybody will recognize that you are my disciples (see Jn 13:34-35). And also: Father, that I may live in them and you in me, so that they may be perfectly one as you and I are one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (Jn 17:21-23)

If today there is a crisis of faith because the world no longer believes, then what must be done so that people may believe? What Jesus says: love one another as he has loved and be one, as he and the Father are one. In this way people will know that Jesus is the one sent by the Father.

If there is a group of men who love each other in this way, beyond death, it is because the risen Christ is in the midst of them, because Jesus Christ has overcome death in them. If not, they could not love each other like this. If they love each other, people will see that Christ is there. And, if they are perfectly one, people will believe that this Jesus Christ who is in the midst of them is the one sent by the Father. If someone believes this, then he is close to the kingdom of God; he has discovered the way of salvation because he has been enlightened. If he believes that Jesus Christ, who is alive and present among Christians, is the one sent by God to save the world, then practically he has known the way of salvation. That sooner or later he draws near the Church, the community, is just a matter of time. But this man is already enlightened, he has seen the light.

Today we must go back to these signs because the Church is missionary today only if she gives these signs to the world.

We have read in the document of the Synod that these small communities must be the leaven of all the missionary spirit of the Church, because they put the Church in a situation of mission.

It's a long time since "*France land of mission*" was written. Spain, too, is mission territory today, because there already are a very high percentage of people who don't care at all about the Church. Working-class masses don't go to Church. All Europe is mission territory.

In Scandinavia, they have put Christianity in the museums and you have to pay 25 cents to see it. That is why we discover that today in Europe, like in Africa, we need to give signs of adult faith, so that the Church may be missionary, so that she may give the signs which call men to faith, so that she may announce Jesus Christ to men.

So what is the answer which the Holy Spirit has given to this situation of the Church through the Second Vatican Council?

To a process of desacralization, a loss of the sense of the worship, of the mystery of God in us, it has replied by renewing the liturgy. And what an outcry there was! What a mess! They are changing our religion - this is what many thought. This is the proof of our infantile faith, of our total verticalism, of the

division in us between the sacred and the profane. Our scandal in front of the renewal shows this. In early Christianity there was nothing of this. God was in the community, in the Church, which is the visible body of Jesus Christ. The Father is accessible through Christ and Christ through the Church. All this was not theory but a living reality.

If you read St. Paul, you will see that his theology is based on the Church as Body of Jesus Christ. People in communion, in *koinonia*, are the Body of Christ; whoever touches a Christian touches Jesus Christ. Whoever welcomes a Christian welcomes Jesus Christ and he will not be without reward. Whoever listens to you listens to me, says Jesus (Lk 10:16).

And, to St. Paul, on the way to Damascus, he says: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Ac 9:14) Jesus Christ identifies himself with the Christians, for they are his Body.

In the martyrs can be seen the absolute conviction that Jesus Christ was in them, that they are Christ. You read this in the "*Acts of Felicity and Perpetua*" or in those of Polycarp. This is so real that it is what the Eucharist preaches: you drink the redeeming blood of Christ and you are transformed into what you drink, as St. Augustine says. In some way the blood of the Christian is transformed into the redeeming blood of Christ. And so St. Paul can say that he completes in his flesh what is missing in the passion of Christ (see Col 1:24).

If we do not understand this, we have understood nothing about Christianity. We have conserved only tinsel. Happy are those who are not scandalized by me! (see Mt 11:6).

I can read you an article by Congar and Rahner who say that in the future there will be a new schism in the Church: those who are with the Council and those who are against the Council. This was prophetic, because we have already reached this point. Today there are those on the one hand who believe that Vatican II is nothing but rubbish, which is sinking the Church. On the other hand, are those who follow the Pope and the Council which said renewal for the Church, with all that this means.

Inside the renewal the liturgy is being renewed: the Mass, the Psalter, the liturgical books, the rituals, the structures, etc., because this is what the Council said had to be done. And if we are against the Council, we are against the Church.

It is logical that some people are scandalized when faced with renewal, since they live their faith very much at the level of natural religiosity. After more than three centuries of the liturgy never changing, which was necessary at the time, now we need time to understand the liturgical renewal. This liturgical immobility had never existed before in the Church. Liturgical expression had always changed throughout the centuries. Unified and unchangeable in its being divinely instituted, the liturgy of the primitive Church had many varying forms. Each Church had its own rites. The Mozarabic (Spanish) rite, for example, had four readings in the Mass and an Anaphora for each Mass. Each Church had its form of exterior liturgical expression. And this liturgical renewal will continue.

It has only begun. There are many people who would like to stop and fix things again once and for all. But it isn't like

this. This is a very serious liturgical renewal and spokes mustn't be put in the wheels, gagging the charisms which God has raised up in his Church to help her go on with the renewal.

Even yesterday, when we were speaking about the lay-out of the church and of moving the tabernacle from the main aisle to a side chapel... Good heavens, what a scandal! Then Jesus Christ is no longer present in the tabernacle? Please! This is not what it is about! There are people who get scandalized and interpret things wrongly. This doesn't mean that the presence of Jesus Christ in the tabernacle is being denied. Quite the opposite! But it is necessary to understand properly why the Council says these things. The Council has begun to renew the liturgy to give an answer to desacralization and it will continue to do so.

In addition, the Council has responded to the process of dechristianization because we have a very infantile faith, a very inadequate, almost still at the level of our First Communion, because we have never received a real and proper catechesis as adults. This is the root of so many of our problems. Who has educated us in adult faith?

We had a catechesis for First Communion, then perhaps we studied religion in school as a subject and often nothing more than that. Who has really initiated us to prayer, for example? Who has helped us to develop the seed of the Spirit present in us through Baptism? Who has given us a true Christian initiation as adults? Who has taught us to answer evil with good?

This is why the Council has renewed its theology, bringing to the fore, in all its splendor, the paschal mystery; discarding juridicalism and certain philosophies which have nothing to do with Christianity.

And now we have a new temptation: to clothe Christianity with psychology, sociology, humanistic ideas and whatever else you want. We dress it up with these because we don't believe in Jesus Christ. We need some other security, some other certitude that can be manipulated by our reason; then we believe.

That is why today we find ourselves at an opportune moment, in which Christianity can divest itself of the extraneous elements with which we have clothed it. Even if there were a resurgence of thinkers who want to write new tomes and fill voluminous tomes: "Marxism and Jesus Christ. The basic points of..." They will say: Freud already said... and everybody goes chasing after these tomes, which seem to give so many guarantees! I have nothing against philosophy as science; I am referring to the clothing of Christianity in certain philosophies.

The Council has renewed theology and has spoken of catechesis, of a catechumenate for adults. The Council and the Church are continually speaking about the need of catechesis for adults. But what happens? A pastor from Rome said to me: When the Council spoke of the necessity of catechesis on the liturgical renewal, I called Father Marsili, a Benedictine of St. Anselm's, one of those who know most about liturgy, who is also a friend of ours. The first evening 37 people came; the second evening, the 17 who come to everything came: Mrs. I-don't-know-who from the Night Adoration group, What's-his-name

from the Boy Scouts, etc. What happened to all the crowds of people who come to Mass on Sunday? Although the pastor had filled the entrance to the church with posters announcing the catechesis, nobody showed up.

The Council speaks of catechesis because people have mistaken ideas about Christianity. We need to give them a true Word, a living Christianity, stripped of the moralism we carry around with us: everything is based on our strength, on our efforts, our good works. The people think that Christianity is a law that they must fulfill by clenching their fists; and since everybody feels very bourgeois and lazy, they do not want to complicate things with too many problems. Mass on Sunday and not much more; then you go home, quarrel with the wife and, if the following Sunday you want to go to Communion, you go to Confession and that's enough.

In front of a process of a crisis of faith that is due to the fact that the world does not see enough signs of adult faith, the Council spoke of ecumenism, of dialogue, of the importance of unity among Christians in order to evangelize today's world. And this surprised a lot of people. And there was I thinking that the Protestants were for hell, that the Jews were the synagogue of Satan, those who killed Jesus! Now they are telling me that the Protestants are our separated brothers and sisters and the Jews are our friends...

People need catechesis so that all these things can be explained to them because the change is very great, serious and profound. That is why every time there has been a Council, God has raised up charisms, saints, realities which furthered the work of the Council and brought it close to the people. There have also been Councils which have been aborted because the Church, because of her sins, did not accept them.

I say with all my heart that the Council is a great springtime for the Church, even if there are many people who see enemies on every side and want to oppose it with reaction, a conservative reaction. But the Holy Spirit cannot be caged and will bring about the renewal desired by the Council.

This Council did not define any new dogma. They spoke about dialogue with atheists. All this means something great for the Church which was emerging from a period of a defensive struggle against modernism, from a position of condemnation of the world and of everything. The Holy Spirit said: Courage! And he has opened the doors a little. For me it is marvelous that the Holy Spirit is blowing with power.

How is this Council to become a reality? This is our problem: to bring the Council to the parishes, to the people. This is what we are trying to do in our own small way. How is this Council to be brought to the parish?

We speak of a post-baptismal catechumenate lived in community and of adult Christian communities within the parish, presided over by the pastor, which can answer this reality, which, within the parish, can begin to create some question marks for those who are far away.

If the Neocatechumenal Way is a way of initiation to faith, in the measure in which the members will begin to have adult

faith, they will begin to create signs for the brothers and sisters who surround them, whether these are people with natural religiosity or completely secularized people.

This certainly answers the crisis of faith: a heterogeneous community, formed by married people, unmarried, young, old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, men and women, among whom love and unity appear as signs of the presence among men of Jesus Christ risen from death, so that all men may be called to faith.

It replies to dechristianization because this neocatechumenal community, taking the infantile faith of the people as its starting off point, begins a way towards adult faith; a catechumenate that lasts years, in which the people will be re-initiated to Christianity, in which they will relive Baptism in steps, as in the primitive Church.

It replies to desacralization because, in the measure in which, also through the liturgy and the sacraments, love and unity begin to be born in us they will be manifested in lived liturgical celebrations. And so there will appear a living liturgy which will no longer be an empty shell, but will be an external body born from a living reality in the depths of us.

This is only the preamble to what I wanted to say.

What is the mission of this community? This is really what I want to speak about.

We have said that this community wants to make the Council a reality inside the Church.

Little by little, this way helps to renew the structure of the parish, of the local Church, in the sense that it transforms the massive parish community into a structure of community of communities, presided by the pastor; communities which are born from one another and exist together with all the other realities in the parish. This new form of parish, like the cellular structure of the living body, responds in a better way to the needs of today's world. A structure in which, if possible, each community has its presbyter and in which all the other charisms appear that form the Body, as we are seeing in many parishes. What surprises us is the great communion that God is giving us. The communities obey their catechists in what concerns the way. Why? Because in them they recognize a charism of God at the service of the Church - in close communion with their Bishop and the pastor, both of whose delegates they are, to lead them, as older brothers, in this journey towards adult faith- and because in some way they see in the catechists signs of witness, who are losing their life for them.

Thus in the parish the different charisms are rediscovered. In this sense as you go through the catechumenate each one of you will discover your "place" in the Christian community, your particular charism. In this sense, as you go through the catechumenate each one of you will discover your "place" in the Christian community, your own particular charism. In the Christian community there are no troops, to put it one way. The Church, like the human body, is formed by members with different charisms which make present the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ in an organic Body. Some people will be called by God to the

presbyterate, or to be deacons; others to be itinerant catechists or local catechists; there will be married couples (Christian marriage is a sign of the love of Jesus Christ for his Church and in this sense has a mission that no other marriage has; only the Christian loves to the point of letting himself be killed by the other as Jesus Christ let himself be killed for his Church. When there is not this love, Christian marriage is a farce and this is why a very high percentage of marriages celebrated in church are a failure; in every country divorce is becoming a necessity because human love has a limit which is to love the other person when he destroys you. This is impossible if you don't have the Spirit of Jesus Christ victorious over death; this is why Christian marriage is a sign for the world). Another charism that will arise is that of the widows: widows not only in the physical sense but because they provide a concrete service which is the charism of hospitality, of service to the itinerants, of visiting the sick, of helping the poor; the charism of virgins will arise, virgins who will discover their charism of consecrated virginity, whether they enter a religious order or they keep on living with their families. Other charisms will appear: lectors, acolytes, hostiaria, didascaloi who help the parents in their task of transmitting the faith to their children, cantors, etc. The pastor presides over all this and, with the other presbyters, brings together in unity all the different realities of the parish.

The local Church calls those who are far away. Among us, this is a fact. We have experienced that those who form the first community are generally people very near the parish but in the second, the third and the others, are many people who no longer went to Church, people who had drifted away. They are relatives, friends, co-workers, of the people in the first community. The attitudes they begin to see in the latter surprise them and catch their attention.

This community lives a kind of spirituality where there is no divorce between faith and life, one without false mysticism, a spirituality which shows itself in concrete life, an historical spirituality based on the history of salvation, on the Word of God, in dialogue with God in the concrete facts of one's history. In fact, you will discover that God speaks to you through your history, through the concrete events of every day. There is the place where God is present, where he dialogues with you, where you have to give your answer. The place where God is present is no longer a temple (see Jn 4:20-24) in which there is a separation between the sacred and the profane, but is life, is history.

I would like to say something to you. Many of you will think: and what happens to the people who are not in the community?

I would like to explain to you what is the mission of the Church for the world. THE CHURCH SAVES THE WORLD.

As you see, this grouping of community of communities within the parish is born from the preaching of the Word of God, which is the sperm of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit descends upon those

who welcome and keep this Word and they begin a catechumenal way in a community to become the adult Church, a true community of brothers and sisters, the Shekinah of God, the presence of God in the world.

The Church is an awesome mystery: a group of men are deified and they form the Body of Jesus Christ risen, of the Son of God. If this happens somewhere, then there victory over death is given. This is a constant announcement of the Good News: Eternal Life has arrived; the Kingdom of God is near. And this saves the world.

That is why it is very important for us that this happens in a visible way; that the world sees precisely this and not merely something like it, a surrogate. At the end of this Way, the Bishop will ask us catechists and the brothers and sisters of your community if in you there are signs of true conversion and a change of moral life sufficient for you to finish the Neocatechumenal Way with the solemn renewal of the baptismal promises. Concretely, the Bishop will ask if throughout the Way you have listened faithfully to the Word of God announced by the Church, if you have begun to walk before God putting the Word you have heard into practice, if you are united, in fraternal communion, with the community and if you have participated in the prayer. (See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, n. 144) St. John Chrysostom says: How many times do I have to say that whoever doesn't do the works of the Holy Spirit, who doesn't practice virtue without effort, cannot be admitted to Baptism? Whoever doesn't do works of eternal life can't be baptized. In the same way, what sense would there be, in this Way, to renew your Baptism if these works of eternal life can't be seen anywhere in your life?

Why? Because, through our Baptism we have been called to be salt, not salt mixed with sand which is unable to salt. No matter how many sacks of salt mixed with sand you throw into a soup, the only thing you will succeed in doing is to spoil everything. Instead, just throw in a little salt and everything is salted. This is why Jesus says: "If salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men" (Mt 5:13).

For the important thing is not to be or not be salt, but that there might be salt that will salt the world, so that the Kingdom of God reaches all men, so that all may receive the announcement of the Good News. God elects his Church for this mission. And God chooses whoever he wants the way he wants; it is not we who choose God. As Jesus says to the disciples: "You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear much fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15:16).

We are not making moral judgments about people. It is only for God to do that. If a Christian doesn't do works of eternal life we don't judge whether he is guilty or not. We don't know if it is because he didn't know or didn't want to respond to the Word or for some other reason; God knows. What we know is that he isn't fulfilling the Church's mission of being salt for the

world. The Church is a service for mankind. And from the beginning God has chosen who he wants to do this service.

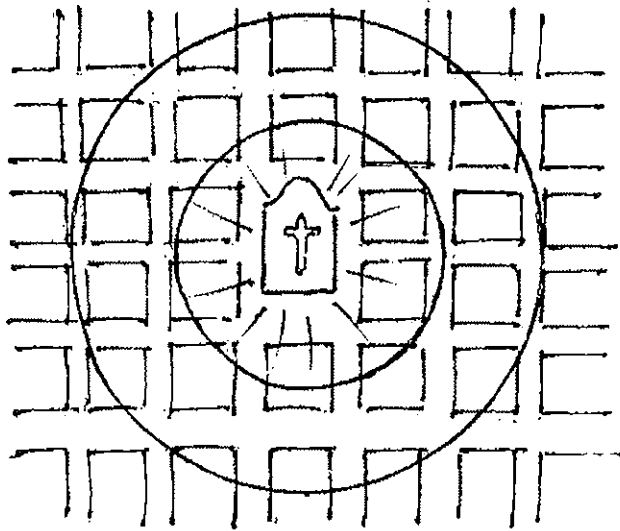
How does the Church save the world? I would like to give you some ideas about this.

In a particular area God has formed his Church. God has established his Church there to be a service to men. The Church is a service for the world, for the nations. The nations will bless God who sent the Church for them.

There is a first circle of people who are called to be made fruitful, to be fermented, enlightened and salted by the Christians. If you really live in a Christian way, they are those who, through contact with you, will also be called by God to constitute the Church as sacrament, as visible sign of salvation, the body of Jesus Christ.

Then there is a large circle of people who will perhaps never enter the Church juridically but they have to be salted, enlightened and fermented by her.

They are those brothers and sisters who see you and say: these people are completely alienated. They are like the Jehovah's Witnesses, because they speak about Yahweh... That is the first thing they think; or that, because you are always carrying the Bible, you are half-Protestant.



This fellow, who is an architect, for example, who works and makes good money, who owns a house in the country where he spends the weekends with his wife and children, this man has met some people who don't think the way he does. With their lives, these people are saying something to him, are calling him to conversion, they enlighten his deep reality. They are announcing the Good News to him: death has been overcome. His skepticism is not the only thing that exists; it isn't only a matter of reading Heidegger and loving animals, because the reality of things is much greater. The Church places man in his profound reality. For man has lost sight of his total reality, he doesn't

know who he is, or what the truth is. He doesn't have an "axis," a point of reference.

The Church doesn't force or oblige anyone but is there. And this man sees his reality and his lifestyle confronted with each other. People like this are fermented in some way by the Church. They see the love that is in her and begin to change opinion: these people aren't as stupid as I believed, nor are they a sect, as I thought. They are wonderful people, they treat me with affection, they help me. This love is what salts men.

The Church exists among them for years, walking side by side with men. When this man is happy because everything is going well, he feels euphoric and doesn't remember the Church. But when he feels disappointed, destroyed because something unexpected, something he doesn't understand, happens and causes him to reappraise his life (his daughter has leukemia or runs away from home, etc.) - misfortune, Vietnam, cancer, injustices, always put man in his reality, they dispel his alienation him, then the Church is there, giving the Good News that for men death has been overcome. Little by little this man is enlightened by the Church and compares the reality of his life with the Church. He admires those who love each other in a way he is not able to and, since he has his own philosophy, he thinks they are the way they are because they are extraordinary people, good people, selected people, who have lots of willpower, who sacrifice themselves. He, on the contrary, feels himself to be very bourgeois and lazy.

This man, one way or another, has been enlightened. If the Church is close to him, it helps him, it enables him to reappraise his life, corrects his ideas. He begins to think that not everything is as dark as it seems, to think that he should be like them, but he feels he is just not able. This man is fermented and salted by the Church which, just by the fact of being there, silent, without doing violence to anyone, is making God present.

The Church has a prophetic mission which respects men's freedom. When God sends Jonah to Nineveh he doesn't give him the guarantee that the Ninevites will convert. He sends him only to preach repentance for the forgiveness of their sins; he doesn't give him any guarantee. The majority of the prophets were stoned to death.

The Church illuminates and salts with love, because this love makes God present. This circle of people, in some way, are fermented, enlightened and salted by the Church.

There is another circle of people whom the Church annoys, disturbs because she denounces them. They are those who cannot bear to think or feel that they don't possess the whole truth; only the fact that someone thinks differently from them angers them. They are those who fight against the Church and persecute her.

Those in the previous group are people of goodwill, more or less, who search and are fermented, because in some way they welcome the news that God freely forgives their sins and that death has been overcome, that the Kingdom of God is offered to them. Because this announcement must reach all men.

This other group of people can't bear this announcement. They are the pharisees who feel denounced by the Church and they want to destroy her because she irritates and disturbs them. They are those who kill the Christians.

In front of them, the Church has no other mission but to let herself be killed, let herself be destroyed and take their sins on herself. It is the attitude of Jesus Christ before the Jews continuing today in history. The only way the Church has to demonstrate to them that death has been overcome is that of the SERVANT OF YAHWEH.¹⁰

The mission of the Church is that of the Servant of Yahweh.

Isaiah has four songs of the Servant of Yahweh, one of which we sang yesterday during the breaking of the bread. Isaiah says this about the Servant:

He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our grieves and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the

¹⁰ CCC 440: Jesus accepted Peter's profession of faith, which acknowledged him to be the Messiah, by announcing the imminent Passion of the Son of Man (see Mt 16:16-23). He unveiled the authentic content of his messianic kingship both in the transcendent identity of the Son of Man "who came down from heaven," and in his redemptive mission as the suffering Servant: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Jn 3:13; Mt 20:28; cf. Jn 6:62; Dan 7:13; Is 53:10-12). Hence the true meaning of his kingship is revealed only when he is raised high on the cross (see Jn 19:19-22; Lk 23:39-43). Only after his Resurrection will Peter be able to proclaim Jesus' messianic kingship to the People of God: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified!" (Acts 2:36).

will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors (Is 53:2b-12).

This, like other impressive songs of the Servant of Yahweh, is the mission of the Church.

The Church says St. Paul suffers in her flesh to complete what is lacking in Christ's passion (see Col 1:24).¹¹ She does this in this announcement which Jesus Christ brought to us of God's love for men and which he continues to bring in each generation through the Church.

In each generation the Good News must be announced to men. There are men who don't listen. This is why persecution has been prophesied to us. There are men in bad faith. There are men who are deeply caught up in evil. These, says St. John, don't come into the light because the light denounces their works as evil and they don't want this to be seen (see Jn 3:20).

God has judged the sin of men and this judgment has been forgiveness. The verdict of God in front of our murders and sins has been mercy. Now, this forgiveness is announced and there is a second judgment: whether this free forgiveness is accepted or not.

He who knows this forgiveness and refuses it condemns himself, because he remains in his sin and rejects salvation. His is the sin against the Spirit (see Mt 12:31-32). Because to accept forgiveness is free. If someone doesn't believe it, he doesn't accept it. These people, instead of accepting it, say that the one who announces this forgiveness is possessed by the devil and a blasphemer. Jesus Christ says: If they say about me that I am possessed by the devil, what will they say about you? Because the disciple is not greater than his Master (see Mt 10:24-25).

This is why, brothers and sisters, you are called to a catechumenal way which ends in death, in death on a cross for love of the brothers and sisters. All of you, like every Christian, will end up on the cross.

The primitive Church was fully aware of this when she says in the Gospel: Someone approaches Jesus Christ and says to him: I will follow you wherever you go; Jesus says to him: Do you want to come with me? Why? Is it because this bohemian life seems wonderful to you, wandering about, without working, traveling, visiting countries? You say: Fantastic! I'm going with him! Jesus says to him: do you know who I am? I am one who is going to Jerusalem to be killed (see Mt 8:18-22; Lk 9:57-62). No man, of his own accord, can want to be dragged to death, if

¹¹ Christ "desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were its first beneficiaries..." (CCC 618).

Jesus doesn't call him. So Jesus goes on to say to this man: The birds of the air have nests and the foxes have holes, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. He told him this and he must have understood this well, because the Gospel doesn't say anything more about him.

No one can follow Jesus just because he wants to. To follow Jesus means to follow him to death, to Jerusalem, to be killed by the world.

It is God who chooses. That is why, immediately after this, Jesus said to another person: You, come and follow me. And this one said: Me? But I must bury my father! How can I leave him without having buried him? Jesus answered him: Leave the dead bury the dead. You, come follow me to announce with me the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the one who calls.

All of you who are here have been marked by the finger of God, you have been called by God, who will give you eternal life. You are going to overcome death, because the risen Christ will grow in you. You will die in your own family, for your wife, for your friends, for your children.

What happens everyday? That many young people want to fulfill themselves in politics or in other things, yet perhaps at home they don't accept their fathers. Not here. Here, the first one you will accept is your father who maybe is a fascist. Otherwise, it is all talk and lies. I knew someone who was wanted to fulfill himself through going to lots of meetings, yet all the time his wife was making a cuckold of him (forgive me), because he wasn't able to love her, because he never spent time with her. As it happens to many who devote themselves to dominoes, to chess or hunting and who abandon the family. Not here. In Italy we have experienced that if there is a girl in the first community, her parents are in the third. Do you know why? Because in her the parents have seen attitudes which they are unable to explain. After being in the community, the daughter is no longer the same as she was before.

And on the other hand, if there is an adult man in the community, later the wife and the children join. Why? Because he manifests signs which attract attention. They are the signs which call others to listen to the kerygma, because in others they have seen in other people attitudes which can't be explained.

Which attitudes? Those of the Servant of Yahweh,¹² who lets himself be judged by everybody without judging anyone, who

¹² CCC 601: The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of "the righteous one, my Servant" as a mystery of universal redemption, that is, as the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin (Is 53:11; cf. 53:12; Jn 8:34-36; Acts 3:14). Citing a confession of faith that he himself had "received," St. Paul professes that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3; cf. also Acts 3:18; 7:52; 13:29; 26:22-23). In particular Jesus' redemptive death fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant (see Is 53:7-8 and Acts 8:32-35). Indeed Jesus himself explained the meaning of his life and death in the light

answers evil with good, who takes upon himself the sins of the others. This is what the Servant of Yahweh does. And this is what the Holy Spirit is going to do in you so that you may be a sign for men. You will let yourselves be killed.

In the world of confrontation and social justice in which we live this is revolutionary and scandalous. Yet this is the mission of the Christian: to let himself be killed. In this will be manifested the love which will be given to you. This is what the Spirit of Christ will do in you. Instead of judging others, which is the only thing you are able to do, you will let yourself be killed by their sins, without judging them, leaving the judgment to God.

St. Peter tells Christian slaves to obey both their just and unjust masters. Because Jesus responded to the evil inflicted on him with forgiveness. When they struck him, he didn't retaliate, even though he received it unjustly (see 1 Pt 2:18-25; Eph 6:5-8).

Every time a Christian does this in the world, he accomplishes an eschatological act: he makes present the final judgment, when God will come to judge the living and the dead.

This, at every level. Do not judge. This morning we saw that this is what the new man does: he accepts the other person, he understands him, he loves him as he is, even though he is his enemy. And this is not as a tactic, or with an effort, but as a free gift of God.

And when are your wife, your children, your co-workers, your boss your enemies? When they have attitudes which destroy you, when they are not as you would like them to be. And what, precisely, shows that you have overcome death? The fact that you go through death, letting yourself be killed by the defects of the other person, which destroy you. You don't do violence any more. If it has been 13 years since your husband took you to the cinema, you no longer have to pull a long face to get him to take you. You understand that if he doesn't take you, it is because he doesn't like to or want to go. Certainly he is a sinner who leaves you on your own, but you love him exactly as he is, exactly there where he kills you. Now you are no longer worried about being loved. It is now you who love the others. Because this is your salvation: that the Holy Spirit has been given to you so you may be like that, once you have been reborn. Now it doesn't matter if others don't love you; you love and understand everyone. You take upon yourself the sins of the others.

This is the attitude of Jesus Christ: to take upon himself the sins of all men, as we read in Isaiah, to take on oneself

of God's suffering Servant (see Mt 20:28). After his Resurrection he gave this interpretation of the Scriptures to the disciples at Emmaus and then to the apostles (see Lk 24:25-27, 44-45).

the resentments, the selfishness, the sins of all men. He didn't judge but let himself be crucified, gaining salvation for us.¹³

It is the will of Christ that this love goes on being made present in the world. How will the men of today come to know that Christ continues to forgive sins and to give eternal life freely? How will they become aware that God forgives them even though they are sinners? No angel is going to come in the night to tell them. This is why the world thinks that God is up there, with a stick as big as this, ready to punish every sin we commit.

How will men of our generation become aware that God loves us as we are? How will they know the Good News? How will your husband, who is a complete egoist, who wants nothing to do with you after a day's work, but just wants to sit in front of the television to watch the boxing, how will he know that God loves him as he is? IF YOU LOVE HIM AS HE IS, A SINNER.

And who is able to love in this way? As soon as someone attacks us, all of us cut him to pieces. Which of us wants to put up with a selfish person, with a drunkard, with someone who exploits the poor? Those who go with selfish people, become selfish, we think. Who loves the enemy? THE ONE WHO HAS OVERCOME DEATH; the person who has received the Spirit of Jesus Christ victorious over death: the Church, the Christians. THE CHURCH SAVES THE WORLD, TAKING UPON HERSELF MEN'S SINS.

This is scandalous. "What is your political and social commitment in front of unjust structures?" they ask us? And they say: these are angelical and mystical communities..., that pray all day without doing anything. They want to see action, immediate action.

We say: no. To do these works of eternal life we need to be Christians with adult faith; it is precisely for this that you are now starting on a journey. In the measure in which Christ grows in you, these works of eternal life will begin to appear in you then, if you are making buttons in a factory and the

¹³ CCC 461: Taking up St. John's expression, "The Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14), the Church calls "Incarnation" the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. In a hymn cited by St. Paul, the Church sings the mystery of the Incarnation: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:5-8).

CCC 615: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). By his obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who "makes himself an offering for sin," when "he bore the sin of many," and who "shall make many to be accounted righteous," for "he shall bear their iniquities" (Is 53:10-12). Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father (Council of Trent).

others start fighting the boss who is a disgusting fat cat, you will love the workers and you will also love the unjust boss and will go on making buttons. This is the attitude which really calls your boss to conversion and freely offers him the possibility of changing. Otherwise maybe, with violence, you can make him change on the outside, but, as his heart has not changed, at the first opportunity he will go back to being unjust.

We are absolutely convinced of this.

Today in the factory, since I don't have the spirit of Jesus Christ in an adult measure, I might say: Damn the bloody man, cheeky face! He's a rat! And in the parish I have a group that I meet with and I say: Things can't go on like this. People are being oppressed and so on and so forth and damn bastards! I need groups for more effective action. It's quite clear: your action is not Christian because you are not truly Christian.

Today there is a crisis of Christian action. Why? Simple! Because we are not Christians. If you really were Christian, I assure you that your attitudes at home, at work, everywhere, would be those of Christ. The fact of the matter is that we don't believe this; it all seems to us to be utopian. St. Paul says: It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me (see Gal 2:20).

The Church is Christ himself continuing in history to let himself be killed by the sins of men. That is why this third circle, like Judas, has a very important mission in Christianity. Judas has a very active part in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus: he handed over Jesus Christ. Those who attack the Church have the very important role of making the fact that Christ continues to live, letting himself be killed, forgiving everyone, shining before everyone.

The blood of Christians continues to be shed in the twentieth century to make present to those who kill them that, in the blood of Christ, poured out for the remission of sins, God freely offers them forgiveness.

What did St. Stephen, the first martyr, say when he was stoned to death as a blasphemer by the Jews? As Jesus on the cross, excuses his murderers: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). Why does he say this? Because his blood makes present the blood of Christ that offers them forgiveness and salvation.

In this way forgiveness of sins for all men is made present. This attitude of the Christian is an eschatological act which must be realized in each generation. This is the mission of the Church.

But, for this to happen it is necessary first of all that Jesus Christ, who has saved you from death and given you eternal life, makes this reality visible in your works through a way of Christian initiation to adult faith.

The *Acts of Felicity and Perpetua*, who were two martyrs of the primitive Church, relate that Felicity was in prison with her mistress, Perpetua, both condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts. Felicity was about to give birth to a child. As she

delivered her child in prison she was screaming because of the labor pains. The prison warder, mocking her, said: "If you scream now, what will you do tomorrow when you are devoured by wild beasts?" She answered: "Now I am the one who is suffering but in the circus, I will not be the one who suffers, but Christ will do the suffering, because Christ lives in me."

The first Christians were absolutely convinced that in martyrdom it was not they who were suffering; it was Jesus Christ who was dying in them, taking on himself the sins of men. This is the spirituality of the martyrs.

Today, we are discovering that in Christianity there is no other spirituality than this. Unfortunately, we have made of the Church not a mission for the world but a place of refuge, like all the other religions.

THE CHURCH IS A LIVING BODY OF MEN WHO ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD, THE BODY OF CHRIST. The true temple isn't an enclosure of dead stones. Christians are the living temple of God (see Eph 2:20-22; 1 P 2:5) and are therefore the place where the world has access to God. That is why Christians are priests, because they participate in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, who is the image of the Father. Men will change their false image of God if they see you, a Christian.

But to achieve this, first of all we have to get Jesus Christ to grow in you, gratis. At present, do you, by any chance, let someone hit you unjustly? Do you let yourself be killed? At this moment these are all nice words. But tomorrow, if your wife doesn't put the children to bed at the time you want her to: what a mess; you will have a go at each other and quarrel...

If we aren't really Christians, it is because we don't have adult faith. Where is faith given? IN BAPTISM and therefore in a CATECHUMENATE that makes the shoot of baptismal grace grow in you. And, here, what are we doing? Exactly this: the Church is setting about gestating adult faith in you, Jesus Christ himself.

LUNCH at 2.00 p.m.

REST

CATECHESIS OF THE SERVANT OF YAHWEH (II) AND CATECHESIS ON THE WAY at 6.00 p.m.

Some of you may have been scandalized by what I said this morning, that one has to let himself be killed, to accept and to take evil upon oneself. Without a doubt this is revolutionary. I understand. I will be very outspoken because this is Christianity. Here there are no problems. Later, you will be asked if you want to continue. Whoever doesn't want to continue should say so without fear and nothing happens.

I understand perfectly the difficulty of accepting this, because we have all been catechized by a double catechesis: one half Marxist and the other psychological.

There are two false prophets in our times: Freud and Marx. They are false prophets because they make an absolute of what

they say. St. John calls the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ a false prophet (see 1 Jn 2:22). They are false prophets because they say that the cross of Christ is useless; what saves is psychoanalysis and the Marxist revolution. For them Christ is someone who alienates you, a prophet who deep down was a victim of the constituted powers and the Church alienates men. This double catechesis is deeply rooted within us and it appears in our ideas and in the way we talk.

From a certain conception of Christianity it is impossible to understand what I am saying. For it is utopian to want to apply what we read this morning in the Sermon on the Mount to an entire society. It can be applied only by domesticating it, sweetening it and making a caricature of it.

St. Matthew is clear: Not to resist evil. If someone wants to take you to court to take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well (see Mt 5:39-40). The *Didache*, which is one of the earliest documents of the primitive Church, begins by saying: There are two ways, one of life and one of death. The way of life is to love your enemies. It goes on to explain very explicitly what it means to love your enemies: not to resist evil. And St. Paul says: Do not return evil for evil (see Rm 12:17-21). Be careful not to return evil for evil to someone (see 1 Th 5:15).

It is obvious that the Church cannot remain silent in front of certain things that are done in society. I didn't say you have to keep very quiet. On the contrary, you have to tell the truth. If sometimes the Church can't speak out, it is because her hands are tied. Jesus Christ always spoke the truth and it was precisely because of this that they took him and killed him on a cross. We say: tell your brother the truth because you love him, not because you hate him. If he doesn't listen to you and, even more, if he wants to kill you because with what you are telling him you are denouncing him, let yourself be killed by him and accept him, taking upon yourself his sin, don't resist the evil he is doing to you. This is what Jesus Christ did, calling the Pharisees to conversion with very hard words because he loved them; but at the end he let himself be killed by them, forgiving them and shedding his blood for them.

And not to resist evil, not only in the field of politics which is the most spectacular place to do it (you denounce certain things in the factory and they kick you out, but you become an idol in the eyes of your co-workers); not only in this area but also in other areas you must not resist evil: at a family level, a personal level, etc., accepting your reality of neurosis, of homosexual tendencies, of shyness. Accept the evil in yourself, take up your cross; recognize your reality of sin.

The position of the Servant of Yahweh is clear. For us the Gospel is neither utopian nor an exaggeration. It is fulfilled "to the letter." It was written precisely because it was a living experience in the primitive Church. The Christian communities fulfill the Gospel literally because it has been given to them as a free gift. They don't water down the Sermon on the Mount. The Gospel is the experience of men who have given their lives.

This can't be understood at a human level, trying to apply the Gospel as if it were a law; as if the Gospel were a book, like Marx's *Das Kapital*. This is what communities of a socio-political kind do; they say: The Gospel is the truth! It must be fulfilled by force and if someone doesn't fulfill it... beat him up. And they coerce people, thumping the table in protest against the bishops, who are on the side of the bosses who are oppressing and grinding the faces of the poor, etc. Do you think this can be accomplished? Do you think it is possible to transform the Gospel into a law? How can the Sermon on the Mount, which is far more difficult than the Ten Commandments which no one has been able to keep, be a law?

It is clear that since we preach the Servant of Yahweh, these groups are against us. They say we are the last weapon the Church has with which to ally herself with the established powers and to put the people under her yoke to exploit them. If someone thinks that, better for him to go away and not waste his time here.

For we are not preaching this. We preach that the Gospel was written by the Holy Spirit and that it is the experience of communities in which the Holy Spirit is living. All these groups start from the presupposition that we are already Christians and that all we need to do is to commit ourselves to act.

We say that if someone is not an adult Christian, it is pointless for him to begin to make plans with his reason and proposals for putting into practice the Sermon on the Mount with his efforts. If we are not Christians, let us become Christians.

What does one have to do to have the faith that is able to fulfill the Sermon on the Mount and to have the attitude of the Servant of Yahweh? Go to the Church and ask for it. For Jesus Christ can't be met except in the Church and precisely in this Church. What we do is this: a catechumenate of initiation to adult faith within the womb of the Church. If many groups today don't know what it means to be a Christian, it is because they are not Christian.

This way is more serious than you can imagine. What commitment and commitment! A serious commitment is letting yourself be killed by your wife; by the pastor (if you are an assistant), who maybe is an impossible old man who makes you say five masses while he's resting. Then you say: Curse the old devil! Fine. Let all the other little groups do what they want and start from here. We all want to wash ourselves, but of other people's sins!

~~We haven't understood that Jesus Christ became sin for us~~ (see 2 Cor 5:21). This means not to have understood the Servant of Yahweh. The Servant of Yahweh is Jesus Christ, who didn't wash his hands of the sins of men, but has taken them on his body, dying in our place, being condemned by the law as a murderer; he, the Just One, as a blasphemer, as a scoundrel and a traitor. On him all our curses have fallen. And, on the cross he didn't say: Why do you kill me? You are committing an

injustice against me! He was silent. He let himself be treated as a sinner letting himself be killed.¹⁴

Is this our attitude? What kind of Christians are we? We say: Me, a sinner? You're the sinner! I know nothing about your sin and I wash my hands of it. The Christian, instead, dirties his hands with the sin of others, with the sin of his wife, the sin of the structures, because he loves men and understands them. Not us! We are very puritanical: sinners? Keep well away from them!

We have to be very careful. Also the Nazis were very puritanical and perfect. They were the super race, with no defects. Clearly, therefore, they had to suppress all those who were flawed or defective. They died as heroes for the Fatherland and the Fuhrer. They were supermen. This is "Nietzscheism." In this regime there is no place for sin. That is why they had to build concentration camps and gas chambers. They could not be contaminated by Jews and gypsies. They were pure. Christianity is the opposite. We start from our deep reality: we are sinners. We understand others without judging them.

It is curious to see Jesus in Zacchaeus' house. Zacchaeus was a disgusting bourgeois who oppressed the people. Even though he was a Jew, he was betraying his fatherland with Rome's power, the power of the oppressors and he was becoming rich at the expense of his own people. He was a traitor to his religion because he was in contact with the Gentiles who were impure. He was a robber who had everything. All the people hated him (and when the people hate, usually they are right.) Well then! Jesus will visit him and will eat with this "model of virtue." He goes and doesn't judge him because he, too, is a son of Abraham. It is precisely this attitude of Jesus Christ that radically changes Zacchaeus' life without Jesus demanding anything of him (see Lk 19:1-10).

Where are we going?

What is it that we want? Mary is the image of the Church, the image which must be fulfilled in these two parishes of Our Lady Help of Christians and St. Isidore. Mary is a woman who

¹⁴ CCC 536: The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29; cf. Is 53:12). Already he is anticipating the "baptism" of his bloody death (see Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50). Already he is coming to "fulfill all righteousness," that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father's will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins (Mt 3:15; cf. 26:39). The Father's voice responds to the Son's acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son (see Lk 3:22; Is 42:1). The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to "rest on him" (Jn 1:32-33; cf. Is 11:2). Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism "the heavens were opened" (Mt 3:16) - the heavens that Adam's sin had closed - and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation.

receives a messenger, a messenger of God, who brings her good news.

This is the annunciation. Let us see the parallel with us. God has sent you a messenger, an angel (a bit ugly and bearded...). In the primitive Church "angel" didn't only mean a disembodied being, but an apostle, one sent, a messenger. That is why the Apocalypse calls the bishops of the Churches angels. And the itinerant apostles who announced the Good News were also called angels.

The angel announces the Good News to Mary. What news? The same that we announce to you: Rejoice Mary because God has chosen you to be the mother of the Messiah, the Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace, to whom you will give the name Jesus (Yahweh saves). And Mary says: how can the Messiah be born in me if I do not know man? And the angel replies: the Holy Spirit will do this in you. And then Mary says: Be it done unto me according to your word; behold the handmaid of the Lord. This means: I believe that the Holy Spirit can make a child be born in me even if I don't know man. And because she believed, the Holy Spirit descended upon her, Mary became pregnant and began to carry the Savior in her womb (see Lk 1:26-38).¹⁵

This is the same news we have brought you. We told you: rejoice, because you have been chosen; God is with you. We announce a good news to you: eternal life is coming to you, a new creature will be born in you, a new creature whose photograph we saw this morning in the Sermon on the Mount: a man who doesn't judge, who doesn't resist evil, who is patient, who excuses everything, etc. ... I spoke to a meeting of many priests from all over Barcelona and only these two wanted me to come to speak to their parishes. And during the Masses many people listened to me but only you have come. God has thought of you. When you heard the announcement you said, like Mary: but how is it possible that I, who am selfish and wicked and spend all my life judging other people, can reach the point of not judging, of not looking lustfully at the women I see in the street? I really have to change a lot! It's impossible! We have answered you in the same as the angel did to Mary: this new creature won't be the work of your clenched fists and your efforts; it will be the work of the Holy Spirit.

So all of you here, who have believed that God is powerful enough to change your heart that is barren of good works into a heart of flesh able to give your life for your enemy, have been filled with the Holy Spirit, who has descended upon you and begun to gestate this new creature in you. This is why the

¹⁵ CCC 148: The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that "with God nothing will be impossible" and so giving her assent: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word" (Lk 1:37-38; cf. Gen 18:14). Elizabeth greeted her: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed (see Lk 1:48).

Fathers call the Word of the apostle the sperm of the Holy Spirit because it has the power to make a new creature grow in you.

For you the annunciation to Mary is the kerygma, which we have proclaimed to you and has caused the one who has welcomed it to be made pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

For Mary there is a period of gestation during which Jesus grows in her womb. At first you don't even notice the baby but then he begins to kick until he wants room to come out. You too need a period of gestation which is the catechumenate, a time in which this seed that you have received may grow and develop until it becomes the adult Jesus Christ. During this time you have to give signs that this baby is inside you because, at the end of the catechumenate, this new creature will be born and how can there be a birth without a baby?

Mary brings forth Jesus Christ: it is the birth. In you, the birth of this new creature, the bringing forth, is Baptism which you will solemnly renew at the end of the Way. To be able to renew your Baptism you have to show signs that you have the adult Jesus Christ inside you. Otherwise you have a hysterical pregnancy because inside there is nothing. You cannot renew your Baptism if you don't do works of eternal life which show that Jesus is alive within you.

The gestation of Jesus in you takes place in the womb of the Church. The baptismal font was thought of as the womb from which the children of God were born. This is very important: there is no catechumenate outside the Church.

Inside the mother, the baby is in a sack of water: the baptismal water is symbol of the womb of the Church which gestates Christians to faith.

And another thing: you can't ask anything of a baby inside the mother; he is given everything. He has an umbilical cord through which he receives everything from the mother. The same happens with a catechumen: he receives everything from the Church. She teaches him how to pray, gives him the Word of God, lays hands on him, exorcises him, etc. and only as this happens, gradually, can he be expected to give fruit.

When Jesus is born, he is born little and he needs a family where he can grow in wisdom and grace, as the Gospel says (see Lk 2:52). This is the family of Nazareth. It is the same with you: the newly baptized person is a little baby who still needs to receive many things. After Baptism you can't go around insisting on converting everyone by hitting them over the head with the cross. This is why St. Paul says to the Corinthians that, like little children, they still need milk because they have only recently received Baptism and they need feelings and other things (see 1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12). For the newly baptized person is clumsy and impulsive, lives very much in his feelings and is full of life and enthusiasm, therefore he needs a period of maturation, living in silence and humility. So after the renewal of your Baptism you will have a period as neophytes. Do you want to know what the community will be like after the renewal of Baptism? Like the family of Nazareth, living in humility, simplicity and praise.

This way is a *kenosis*, a descent. No one can go through the door of the Kingdom if he doesn't become small (see Mt 7:13-14; Mk 10:14), if he hasn't discovered that everything is grace of God, a free gift. Whoever has not discovered his real poverty as a sinner, will not discover that God is the one who brings life, a new creature, out of death and sin. Mary and Joseph know perfectly well that this child is not the fruit of their efforts, that he doesn't belong to them because of their merits and they live in the praise of God because God is in their midst, because this child is the Son of God.

But what is the mission of the family of Nazareth? To make this baby grow so that he can fulfill his mission. For this child is the one sent by the Father to save humanity. This is the mission of the family of Nazareth: that Jesus may become an adult to save humanity. For when this baby becomes a man he sets off on a journey, he will go up to Jerusalem to be killed for the world.¹⁶

He comes to fight against death to overcome it; he comes to destroy the evil one and the power the evil one had over men because of sin; he comes to take on the sins of all men and to crush them against the cross, winning eternal life for us.

During the Neocatechumenal Way the community is not yet an adult Christian community. It is a community which is renewing its Baptism in steps. When you will solemnly renew the sacraments of Christian initiation, this community will live in humility, in simplicity, because for years it has eaten the bread of its sins and so has experienced the saving power of Jesus Christ risen. If someone thought he was better than the others, God saw to it to show him who he was until he became a child and entered through the narrow door. Everyone discovered that he was barren of good works so that afterwards he wouldn't think that the works he does are the fruit of his efforts. For no one can steal God's glory.

¹⁶ CCC 149: Throughout her life and until her last ordeal (see Lk 2:35) when Jesus her son died on the cross, Mary's faith never wavered. She never ceased to believe in the fulfillment of God's word. And so the Church venerates in Mary the purest realization of faith.

CCC 964: Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death" (LG 57); it is made manifest above all at the hour of his Passion: Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, joining herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim, born of her: to be given, by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross, as a mother to his disciple, with these words: "Woman, behold your son" (LG 58; cf. Jn 19:26-27).

This community will live in praise. Every meeting will be a thanksgiving and the Eucharist will be the culmination of this. Then you will celebrate marvelous Eucharists. You will give praise because God lives in your midst; because the other, in the Christian community, is a sign of Christ; because each person is a member of the visible body of Jesus Christ. In fact, in the community, the other one who perhaps hurts you belongs to Christ.

What is the mission of this community? That of the Servant of Yahweh. To take on itself the sins of mankind: this is the mission of Christ which is perpetuated in history, through his body which is the Church. This is your mission: to go up to Jerusalem to be killed for the world, because this is the only way for the world to realize that death has been overcome.

Why do the rich nations accumulate money and abandon the third world? Because they are afraid of death and need the security of money. It is necessary that the Church be in their midst and announce the Good News to them.

SUMMARY

Annunciation	Gestation	Birth	Family of Nazareth	Death in Jerusalem
Kerygma	Catechumenate	Baptism	Neophyte	Servant of Yahweh

Let's go back to the beginning to see how you will continue in this way.

You will relive your Baptism in steps. At first you have lived a Phase of Conversion which have been the catechesis that finish with this convivence. Now there is a period of Precatechumenate, then the Catechumenate. At the end is the time of the Election. It all ends with the renewal of Baptism.

After this convivence those who will decide to go on will begin the Precatechumenate. Let's see now what you will do.

First thing: there can't be a catechumenal dynamic without the Church, without an umbilical cord, without catechists, without apostles to lead you in the name of the Church. These communities won't walk by themselves, as they like, with everyone doing as they please. These communities are guided by us, like older brothers and sisters, in the name of the bishop. We have the mission of leading you to adult faith, to the renewal of Baptism. We are the guarantors of your catechumenal way before the bishop. This is why there is no authentically ecclesial catechumenate without your obedience to the catechists and the obedience of the catechists to the pastor, who is in charge of the parish community and to the bishop.

Today there's great confusion about this: everyone starts communities by themselves and do what they want and invent their own way. Not here. This is a catechumenate. A catechumenate is guided by catechists who are able to bring people from an infantile to an adult faith and who, for this reason, have received a charism that has been confirmed by the bishop. In the primitive Church the catechumens had a doctor who educated them

in faith. This is why if you don't have confidence in us, we can't do anything. If the community doesn't accept us, we go away and there is no problem.

This is why I ask you to trust in the way. In a year's time we will come back to visit you. Now you will walk for a year and we will tell you how.

How do you walk in the precatechumenate?

We have spoken of a tripod on which all the way is based: Word, Liturgy and Community. This tripod makes Jesus Christ present in this period.

The first thing is that we go away. Because if I were to stay with you for a while, you would end up as Kikians...You would become "clericalized" in my style. It is not a question of plagiarizing anyone. That would be absurd: it would be a kind of brainwashing through the reasoning. What you will do is to gather together in an assembly, presided over by the Presbyter, called there by the Holy Spirit. In these assemblies, God will speak to you.

These meetings are of three kinds: one to celebrate the WORD, to make Jesus Christ present through the Word of God; another to make Jesus Christ present through the sacraments, especially the EUCCHARIST and the Penitential; and a third which is the CONVIVENCE in which Christ becomes present through the brothers and sisters.

The way is as simple as that.

Each week there will be a day for the celebration of the Word of God. And as the sacramental liturgy, there will be the celebration of the Eucharist on Saturday night. You will celebrate the Eucharist as we celebrated it here. And once a month, the community will meet in convivence where you will celebrate Lauds and each brother and sister will give their experience of the Word and the Eucharist and will speak about his problems, his experience of God in his concrete life, etc. This is a day you will "live together."

Apart from that everyone lives in his own home and goes on with his own work.

The celebration of the Word is prepared by a team of people at someone's home. These teams are made up in rotation, so that after a period of time, everyone will have prepared with everyone else. We will leave you a list of 150 biblical themes.

The first thing that happens is that you will be initiated to the Scriptures. You will get to know the books of both the Old and New Testaments. Maybe many of you have read the Bible but haven't understood much. Now you will get to know the biblical language through simple themes from ordinary life: words as simple as rock, tree, water, house, man, child, mother, door, etc. To prepare these themes, you can find help (all the communities do this) in the *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* by X. Leon-Dufour, which develops each theme with the quotations from the Bible that refer to that particular theme.

What does the preparation team have to do at home? The team of catechists will stay on to explain this in greater detail to

the team of responsables who will prepare the Word for a month or two. But I will give you some idea now.

One evening, a team will meet to prepare the Word for the whole community. With his Bible tucked under his arm each member of the group goes to Joe's house, whose turn it is to have the meeting. You begin by invoking the Holy Spirit so that he will enlighten you to help the community and that he will open the Scriptures for you. Then you find the theme you have been given in the *Dufour* dictionary. One of you reads aloud all that's written there on the theme but without reading out the references. Then you begin to read all the references given. At the beginning we don't ask very much of the person who wants to be Christian, only that he begins to get to know the books of Scripture. The way to do this is through these biblical themes.

Imagine that in this group there is a 47 years old lady who has never in her life held such a big book in her hands. Joe tells her: Look up Numbers 17:4-35. And she says: "What on earth is that?" Joe says: "It's a book of the Bible." "What page is it on?" "How should I know, look for it?" The whole group waits patiently that this lady turning over page after page may find the Book of Numbers. After four minutes she says: "Here it is." (Don't laugh, because this is what happens.) The experience of eight years that we have with all kinds of people (rich, poor, intelligent and not so intelligent) tells us that this thing so simple gives wonderful results. We avoid easy ways out. Priests are usually in a hurry, because this wastes a lot of time and they bring along four quotations ready so as to finish earlier...

In the preparations there's a marvelous meeting with the Word of God. The community catechizes itself through meetings that are celebrations, real liturgies with the Word of God at the center, presided over by the presbyter who gives the homily. You will see in the next meeting that you will have after the convivence how the Holy Spirit is there. We don't carry the Holy Spirit around with us in our pockets.

I remember a priest in Florence saying that what had converted him was not the catechesis but the period after when we catechist left. Because he thought: the first meeting, when these people are gone... And he was dumbfounded by the way the people spoke and how the Holy Spirit was there. And they didn't even have guitars, because when we went away none of them knew how to play.

The Eucharist on Saturdays is also prepared by another team.

The Word is like bread, which has to be prepared and shared out with the brothers and sisters. Each team makes this bread, prepares it for the community. It's a service to the community. First of all we will teach the team of responsables who will then teach the others. Don't worry: even the Indians in Columbia are doing this and they have learned to read just in order to get to know the Bible.

A danger is that the community doesn't want to follow the way and says: What rubbish...! With all the problems there are in the world today here we're talking about trees and pieces of

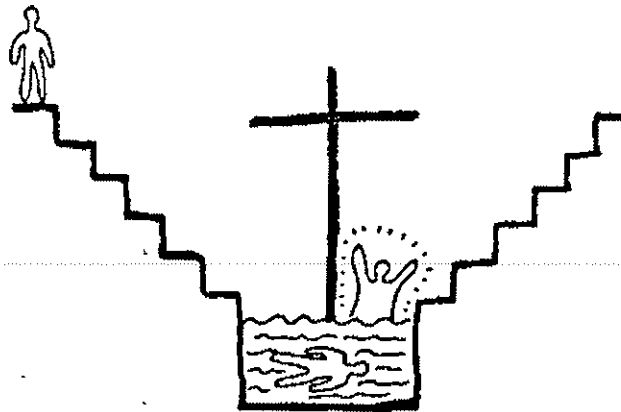
rock... No, man! The Concordat! Vietnam! Social justice! The IRA! Pakistan!

This happens in many groups. They begin by reading the Bible until one day someone in a meetings says: Yes, yes, this is all very nice but what about the people dying of hunger? What are we doing here? I'm fed up reading the Bible. We must talk about concrete problems. That day they closed the Bible and talked about Bangladesh. But since each person has his own opinions on concrete issues, there is no way of understanding each other. The old people leave because they don't understand anything about Mao or Marcuse. What's left is a very lively group of university students and there's always someone who exercises a lot of influence on the others and saves no one. And Jesus Christ? What about him! He's sitting up there in heaven and we're down here with our problems.

This is the crisis of the world today. We don't think like this. Jesus Christ is alive and comes with us to lead you to an adult faith. St. Paul says that God wanted to save man through the foolishness of the preaching (see 1 Cor 1:21). Think of St. Paul when he spoke about the resurrection at the Areopagus. They all fell about laughing and said: About this we'll listen to you some other time. And they all went away (see Ac 17:16-34). Heavens above! With all the nice cultural problems the Greco-Roman world had at that time, they had to listen to some simpleton talking about the resurrection from the dead...

Today we believe more in science and technology and yet God wants to save the world through the foolishness of the preaching. The preaching is a Word which will save you: Jesus Christ will come and transform everything.

NOTE: During this catechesis you need to remember that the catechumenate is a way of descent. About this the Community and the brothers and sisters help us to see our inability to love.



BREAK

CONCLUSION at 6 p.m.

Each person briefly gives his experience of the catechesis and the convivence and says whether or not he wishes to go on.

Then the community (or communities) is formed. Each one elects a team of responsables. These say whether or not they accept. Then the community is assigned a presbyter who will preside over it.

The convivence finishes with a final prayer and the singing of the "Magnificat."

The team of catechists has three meetings with the presbyter and the team of responsables to prepare the first celebration of the Eucharist, the first celebration of the Word and the first convivence

LIST OF BIBLICAL THEMES FOR THE CATECHUMENATE

1	Rock	57	World	111	Hardness
2	Bread	58	Poor of Yahweh	112	Meekness
3	Lamb of God	59	Death	113	Meal
4	Amen	60	Passover	114	Test
5	Election	61	Sin	115	Freedom
6	Peace	62	Wake	116	Blood
7	Vineyard	63	Remnant	117	Testimony
8	Light	64	Resurrection	118	Humility
9	Door	65	Gift	119	Saturday
10	Wine	66	Richness	120	Slave
11	Kingdom	67	Spirit of God	121	Error
12	Word	68	Transfiguration	122	Holy
13	Groom	69	Gospel	123	Impious
14	Land	70	Face	124	Loneliness
15	Covenant	71	Charisms	125	Fasting
16	Desert	72	Listen	126	Sleep
17	Tree	73	Heritage	127	Anointment
18	Water	74	Messianic	128	Robe
19	Cross		Banquet	129	Alien
20	Victory	75	Truth	130	Scandal
21	Idols	76	Father	131	Judgment
22	Night	77	Unity	132	Enemy
23	Law	78	Christ	133	Wrath
24	Image	79	Joy	134	Leprosy
25	Serve	80	Confession,	135	Presence
26	Hope		martyr	136	Hunger
27	Temple	81	Power	137	Exodus
28	Way, Journey	82	Child	138	Desire
29	Love	83	Blessing	139	Creation
30	Nations	84	Stone	140	Heart
31	Flesh	85	Man	141	Brother
32	House	86	Arm, right	142	Salvation
33	Church	87	Pharisees	143	Fruit
34	Body	88	Friend	144	Sacrifice
35	God	89	Heaven	145	Revelation
36	Wisdom	90	Obedience	146	Search
37	Power	91	Grace	147	Circumcision
38	Woman	92	Hell	148	Reconciliation
39	Exile	93	Tongue, lips		
40	Name	94	Neighborhood		
41	Eucharist	95	Know		
42	Faith	96	Kneel		
43	Jesus	97	Feast		
44	Life	98	Disciple		
45	Day of the Lord	99	Hour		
46	War	100	Will of God		
47	Israel	101	Rest		
48	Shepherd	102	Fear		
49	Praise	103	Book		
50	Glory	104	Mount		
51	Mother	105	Homeland		
52	Sea	106	Mystery		
53	Fire	107	Fast		
54	Messiah	108	Son		
55	Sow, Harvest	109	Strength		
56	Mission	110	Vocation		

APPENDIX 1MEETING WITH THE CATECHISTS
BEFORE BEGINNING THE CATECHESSES

(Madrid October 22, 1981)

(Kiko)

I will say a few things for all the teams.

Tomorrow you'll go to introduce yourselves to the pastors. Introduce the whole team, with humility, without pretension. The responsible can tell the pastor not to be afraid. Maybe he'll be expecting to see one of the responsables for the area and when he sees someone appear with the face of a poor soul like you, he will find himself having to make a first act of faith, with is always very difficult. We are all human; we pay attention to human things and not to the Lord, who does marvels with weakness. We look only at a person's human qualities, at their level of education, etc. We don't realize that what is necessary for giving the catechesis are three fundamental things:

- First: you need to be sent. And we are sent by our Baptism and because the diocese of Madrid, the bishop, has welcomed this charism, recognizes it (this Center where you are meeting was inaugurated by Cardinal Tarancon) and is happy that catecheses are being given in the diocese. In other words, by means of this charism it is sending you, through your communities.

- Second: you need to be witnesses. You cannot evangelize without being a witness to what you are saying. This doesn't mean that you have to be witnesses of everything, because perhaps you are saying things that go far beyond what you are living. You do a ministry in the name of the whole Church. It's not a matter of preaching only the little bit of faith that you have. Preach in the name of the Church. But you must be witnesses that Christ is alive, that Christ is risen. You have to have, therefore, a little experience of Jesus Christ, an experience of faith. All of the apostles, when they announce the Kerygma, say: "We are witnesses of this" (see Acts 2:32; 3:15).

The third thing you need to announce the kerygma is to go with nothing. YOU NEED TO LOSE YOUR LIFE. This is very important. If you do not lose your life, if you go to sell something, if you are looking for something for yourself, you are not witnesses and you cannot catechize, for to catechize presupposes that what you are announcing you are making real with your presence. It's possible that in the team there will be a brother or sister who doesn't say much, but the fact that they are there, night after night, at that time of night, going to the place, in rain or snow, makes the people ask: but why is he there, making a show of himself, why is he there without ever saying a word? Maybe the one who speaks is more fulfilled, but the one who never speaks is losing his life more. To catechize you have to go, as Jesus says, without knapsack or staff (see Mt 10:10), giving yourself completely, giving your life.

What really converts isn't that you give the catechesis very well. For example, imagine that it's your turn to give the fourth or the fifth catechesis and you stammer, you stutter, it's all a mess. Don't be alarmed because the Lord will bring fruit out of all this. Perhaps God allows this so that you realize that you are not there looking for some advantage for yourself but that it must be very important for you to evangelize if you're able to make a fool of yourself.

I remember a story told by a very scholarly Jesuit, who gave retreats and thought he was very cultured, who went to the catecheses in the parish of San Jose, where lots of people came. God willed it that that evening the catechesis was being given by a working man who came to a halt and didn't know how to go on, and another person had to take over and he wasn't able to go on either. The fact is that they looked foolish. Finally the pastor got up and gave a sermon. (This happened at the beginning of the way, a long time ago.) At the end this priest came up to the pastor and said to him: "Look, I'm so and so, I speak five thousand times better than you, but what I'm not able to do is what this guy has done: make a fool of myself. To make a fool of yourself you have to have faith and I haven't got enough faith. You didn't convince me but these others have convinced me and because of that I'm going to keep coming." He said something that was profoundly true. We can all give little sermons. But to be able, for love of the people, to risk becoming blocked, this - said this priest - I've never done. So they had borne witness. It's not that this brother hadn't prepared the catechesis. But this happened and he had been able to risk making a fool of himself in front of a lot of people, for love of them. So don't worry too much. When you're on screen, as they say in television, well the time has come; let it be whatever God wants.

This doesn't mean that you mustn't prepare the catechesis. Giving the catecheses is a suffering and this suffering is part of losing your life; the suffering that you have to meet to prepare the night before, to have many evenings taken up.

If someone complains, if the wife is saying all day long: but what a mess; I've had enough! Well, look, take away that couple and put another, because if they complain, complain against God, they can't give the catechesis. If there's someone who's in crisis, then maybe he can't give the catechesis. So the community should meet in a convivence where everyone gives their experience and another catechist is elected. Electing a catechist is very important. God will bless you with a hundredfold in everything; there's nothing greater.

You should bless the Lord for allowing you to announce his name. The first charism of the Church, the greatest of all, is that of the apostles, that of founding the Church. How is the Church founded? With the kerygma. What is the kerygma? The sperm of the Holy Spirit, as the Fathers of the Church called it. It is this announcing of Jesus, of the Good News. Maybe you complain because you have to do catecheses and there are priests who would like to give them and have to stay closed in an office.

Do you know why to preach is marvelous? Because God accompanies you. Jesus Christ risen accompanies you. It is what the end of St. Mark's Gospel says: Jesus, after being seated at God's right hand, accompanied them in the evangelization with signs and wonders (see Mk 16:20).

Jesus is the one who converts, Jesus is the one who heals. You'll see in the catecheses how the Gospel is accomplished. Christ appears because he always precedes us in the evangelization. He appears and what happens? That the blind see, the lame walk, the unclean spirits come out of the people, the sick are cured, the poor listen to the Good News, the poor are evangelized, the last of the earth (see Mt 11:4-5).

I would like you to have listened to the Poles. Just think that in Poland it is not possible to be an itinerant because no one can leave his work, because of the political situation. So we had the itinerants' convivence in Italy and 30 Polish catechists came. Do you know how they are giving catecheses throughout Poland? A team of catechists has to give catecheses three hundred kilometers away, for example. They finish work at five o'clock, take the train and go, let's suppose to Bilbao or further, give the catechesis, go back on the train, getting home at four in the morning, and at seven they have to be at work. This is how the communities in Poland were founded. Now count how many hours they sleep! And no one has pulled out. This is what they do, or in Poland it's impossible to evangelize. God has blessed these brothers and sisters, God has helped them and they are very happy. Certainly, they could decide not to do it. Why should I lose my life? Why should I be here giving years of my life, of my sleep, for these brothers and sisters? On the other hand it is this that is renewing the Church; they are ready to risk their lives. It's clear that nobody can be obliged to do this.

I hope that the Holy Spirit will make you see what a miracle it is that the Lord is calling you to evangelize, that he calls you to found a community. To form a community is something that humanly speaking is impossible. Many priests, sociologists, etc., have wanted to found communities and have not been able to. What is formed is a group of friends, where what unites them is friendship or politics or sport. But to found a community of a heterogeneous group of people; that there the Church is born... Because the Church appears where communion is born.

I told you not to get too angry if someone gives the catechesis badly. ~~This doesn't mean that you shouldn't prepare the catechesis, or that, once it has been given, you shouldn't look at how it went.~~ But be careful about reviewing the catechesis! Because some people are ruthless. They attack you and since you have put all your best into it, you get very angry and you say: but I've done my best. Be careful! Anyway, the community is not born because you have said everything. Certainly, if something fundamental gets left out, you need to say it, but even this isn't the most important thing.

Sometimes it can happen that someone says something that is exaggerated and you have to accept this -but try not to

exaggerate too much- because to announce the kerygma is not to give lectures. You have to give the kerygma with passion, with fire. It is much more than an enlightening of the intelligence. It is a shout, a trumpet, a Good News, a Catechesis. The word catechesis comes from "katekeo" which means "to make resound." You have to make the faith resound deep down in the fiber of the people who are listening to you.

The people who are listening to you are baptized but there are areas that are asleep, the areas of our faith. The mission of the catechist is to make God's love for man resound, thunder, in the depths of man's spirit, so that this resounding brings him to opt, to move, to decide for Jesus. Christianity is not an indoctrination; you don't indoctrinate anyone.

The first catecheses are a preparation for the kerygma. In rural areas people take fright at the questions and sometimes stop coming because they are afraid of making fools of themselves.

The catechesis is neither a theory nor a cultural exercise, but is to put the person listening in front of a person who is Jesus. It is to put him in front of an historical event that judges him, so that, according to the reaction of the person to the historic event before him, he is already judged.

This is what is said in one of the catecheses. When at the time of the invasion of Normandy, that woman goes from house to house saying: "They've landed!" this news, this event, immediately tells everyone what he has to do. Those who had collaborated with the Germans are afraid and make their escape; those who are waiting for the liberation, because they are oppressed, go out into the streets with the flags they have been hiding. Everyone knows how to react in front of this event; he cannot remain impassive and if he remains impassive, he is already judged.

You have to affirm an event, a real event: Christ is risen; he is alive! This isn't something invented by the priests so that people won't get divorced. This is a fact and you are witnesses of this fact. It is a fact that cannot leave people indifferent. For if the apostles really have seen a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who has come back from the cemetery, if they have seen him alive, risen, and he has said to them: "Look at my hands; put your hand in my side" (see Jn 20:27), that means that he is alive, so heaven exists, judgment exists, everything that has been said is true.

With this I mean that religion is not then just something to keep God happy, "just in case." If I am announcing Jesus Christ to you now, I am an event for you, a fact that forces you to make a decision: either you believe or you don't. But in any case, you have to take into consideration this fact: that I believe, that I am losing my life for this event, I am losing my life for you by having this meeting and dedicating my life to the evangelization through the neocatechumenal Way.

If Christ had not met me, I wouldn't be here talking to you; if he hadn't changed my existence. So I am a witness that he is alive, that he is Love, that he has saved my life, that he has given me the strength to be faithful, that he protects me so

that I can be celibate, so that I can live as a virgin, for him alone, because he is enough for my life. Because it is true that his yoke is sweet and his burden light (see Mt 11:30). Before I met Jesus I was a painter, a young man like all the rest, with crises, with messes in my life, with the desire to triumph. I liked the cinema, the theatre, etc. I was neither better nor worse than others. Despite all this Jesus chose me, for I had not chosen him, but he chose me and came to meet me (see Jn 15:16). He had prepared a whole plan for me of which I knew nothing and I don't know what he has prepared for me in the future. I discover it little by little and I am always happy. I can say that for me his yoke has been sweet and his burden light. All in all, a liberation, a marvel in comparison with what I suffered before with my complexes, because of the hatred I had for my father and mother, because of my brothers, because of the difficulty of communication with others, because of my conflicts with girls, because of a series of events which enslaved me; but above all because of my inability to love, because of the immoderate desire to look for myself, to triumph, to win. And in the world you triumph only by killing other people, as you know.

The Lord will help you. The most important thing is that where the Gospel is announced the Lord goes before you, goes before you, giving the Holy Spirit to the people who are listening to you. It is Jesus Christ who does the catechesis, Jesus Christ who evangelizes. What do you do? You lend your bodies to the Lord.

We are useless servants. Don't give too much importance to human things. This doesn't mean that you don't need to prepare the catechesis. No, it's clear that you need to prepare it and also see afterwards how it has gone.

Some teams get scandalized because they are not in communion. The first time you evangelize everyone wants to give this or that catechesis and you argue. Then there's always someone who says: but how are we going to preach if we don't believe it, if we don't understand it, if we're not in communion, etc. Many times the Lord allows the team to be like this a bit, allows these sufferings and differences to happen. First of all: to convince you that it is God who evangelizes, that it has not been your work. This is so true that for many teams it is a shock to see the community appear, because they thought that everything depended on their personal holiness.

At this moment you are doing a ministry. Before having a crisis or whatever, you have offered your bodies to the Lord for the evangelization. And God has taken what you have given, your body, which, if you like, isn't much, and thanks to this is doing a very great work, a marvelous work with you. God himself allows all that happens in the team to happen, to convince us that it is he who is doing everything, to preserve us from the pride that can completely ruin his work.

Then, another thing: don't think that you can evangelize without the cross. If things are going very well, they aren't going well. There's something you have to remember: when things go too well, they aren't going well. Lots of people come, the

pastor is in agreement, everybody is happy... it's not going well, something smells fishy. You will see that at the seventh catechesis or after the community is formed, there is a turn around, they begin to attack you, when you are half asleep. Usually the devil has to appear, because the devil works with the Lord (see Job 1-2), even if the demons are submitted to God and can do nothing without God's permission. The cross has to appear. Many times God allows certain sufferings in the team so that it is clear to everyone that you are not there to look for your own interests but that you are giving your lives for the people, because the Gospel is founded on the cross of Christ.

And what is the cross? Well, I'll explain it to you. St. Paul says: "Carrying always in our bodies the dying of Jesus" (see 2 Cor 4:10). What does "the dying of Jesus" mean? St. Paul explained it earlier. How did Jesus die? He was crucified. That is, Christians are Christians not because they believe in Christ in an ideological way but because they make the cross of Christ real and present. How? EVERYDAY IN HISTORY. Christians are continually crucified for the world. St. Paul says: "I am crucified for the world" (see Gal 6:14). How are we crucified? How do we live our faith? How do adult Christians live their faith? Little by little we are bringing you to this, without scandalizing you too much, otherwise you would run away from here. For if we tell you what Christianity is before you have the strength to take it (because Christianity is a free gift which comes from heaven), you would believe that you have to do it by yourselves, with clenched fists. And, since you aren't able to do it, you would run away and not come back.

In the second letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul says: "We do not preach ourselves but Christ as Lord" (see 2 Cor 4:5). It is the content of the kerygma: that to this man, a carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth, who died, etc., God has given a name above all other names, the name of KYRIOS - he is the Lord (see Phil 2:9). And this work that God has done in Christ obliges each of those listening to this announcement to take a position in front of this Jesus.

As I said to you before, you are not going to preach an ideology. The preaching of the kerygma is neither indoctrination nor brainwashing. You are making present an event that, in the moment you are preaching it, becomes real. In other words, in the moment you are saying that Christ is risen and comes with you, CHRIST IS THERE AND THEY CAN EXPERIENCE HIM THROUGH HIS SPIRIT WHICH HAS PRECEDED YOU. In such a way that you are speaking and what the gospels say is happening: their spirit is rejoicing (see Lk 24:32).

Jesus was walking along with the men from Emmaus (see Lk 24:13-35) - an image of the risen Christ preaching - and they said: "Don't you remember how our spirits rejoiced when he spoke of the Scriptures?" Christ risen, with a different appearance, wasn't recognized by them. They had been with him for three years but he appeared with a different body, with another external form. He was the Lord and he went along talking to them. Beginning with the Scriptures, with Moses, (it's how the catechesis is done) with the Psalms, the Prophets, he spoke to them of what the Scriptures said about him. Afterwards, at the

breaking of bread, they discover that it is he, the Lord. One of the proofs that made them recognize that it was he was that their spirits moved when he spoke. This is a very important sign. When you speak, Christ speaks. When Jesus Christ speaks, the Holy Spirit, which comes to rest on those who listen, moves their spirits. It is like a fire that is born within, something that provokes enthusiasm in them, that says to them: it's like that; it's really like that. For what is faith if it is not the Spirit of the risen Christ witnessing to the spirit of those listening that he is the Lord, that you are a son of God? (see Rm 8:16). It is the Spirit of the risen Christ who bears witness to your spirit.

And how does this meeting, this faith, come about? Through the preaching (see Rm 10:17). And this can happen very well through a poor working man who speaks very badly or through a pregnant woman who gets up to give the catechesis as she can. But without any doubt there is there the "numinousness" of God, there is the Lord who is acting. Before you got there the Lord had already preceded you (see Mt 28:10).

Then, another problem you have. Please don't be worried about success. Success is a trick of the devil to discourage you and stop evangelizing. 150 people come the first day, 120 the second, then 30 are left. God is permitting this, perhaps, to test the pastor. We know that it is the Lord who brings the people, he makes them come. Those whom God wants keep coming. It can be that big communities are born and afterwards nothing is left. Instead a little community of twelve people survives, keeps going and manages to renew the parish. In this sense we have a lot of experience already about all this. Don't make projections about the future because we know nothing of what is best.

Another terrible problem that can arise is that the pastor begins to get nervous because he doesn't like the catecheses. This really is a problem because sometimes the priests have an idea of what the catechesis is and they think that the catechists should almost be professors of theology and they expect to hear certain things. They sit there and begin to shift in their seats because they are not hearing exactly what they think. This is the first serious problem they have.

Second problem: the pastor already has an idea of the people who will come. He is counting on so and so, on this other person, on the most able of the parish, and then it happens that none of these come, but there is a group of poor souls and other people who are never seen in the parish. This is a big disappointment to him and he feels destroyed. Already he doesn't like the thing and is not convinced. Finally he sees that the numbers are dropping and begins to think that this is because the catecheses aren't done well, that he has been deceived, because he wanted a team with a better formation and not these people who come here and say things that are "very poor."

Don't let yourselves be deceived by all this. Tell the pastor to be patient, to pass to faith, TO PASS TO FAITH, that you are there in the name of Jesus Christ, that you are not there in your name and that it is he who has chosen you, that

you haven't chosen this parish and that if marvelous studies were needed there would never be any evangelization. The first apostles didn't have much formation in the human sense (see Acts 4:13). You have enough formation to be able to announce the kerygma, to be able to announce Jesus Christ, to be able to give some very simple schemes. For the most important thing is what you have lived in your flesh. Later there will be the "didascaloi," the catechesis. Little by little the way will take on the task of formation, through the notes of the Jerusalem Bible, on which the most important theologians of the Church have worked, through the Leon-Dufour, and above all through the Scriptures in the preparations and celebrations of the Word. There is a slow, long way that will give formation and correction. However, as I said, the kerygma at the beginning, is, above everything else, a trumpet. In this you must be patient with the pastor and encourage him, tell him not to worry. Say to him: Courage. Where we are weak, Jesus is strong! (see 2 Cor 12:10; 13:3) In your weakness the power of the Lord is shown. Might it not be, Father, that the Lord is "beating you up" a little? Isn't it the case that he is humiliating you because you already had an image of what the catechesis should be? But God does things differently.

This has happened a thousand times. The pastors say to us: No, I want that team because they know how to catechize. I don't like this team. Sometimes we have given in to him and sent that team - and what a fiasco! Sometimes too, two communities are born and the pastor has chosen his little group of friends and even waged a campaign to get the responsible he wants elected. The pastors who have done things like this have been left without communities after two years. This is not how the Way functions.

Many times the Lord chooses the poorest in the parish and calls people who are far away. He puts as the responsible a poor soul who perhaps took drugs before, because at this moment this is the only way the Lord has to keep hold of him. For the Lord cares for one sheep as much as for the whole world, because if not, perhaps this man wouldn't have resisted even two months. Well, maybe he has resisted two years and then has stopped taking drugs and gone on with the way. Huge things. The Lord knows. It is the Lord who leads the community and the Lord who guides your catecheses.

If you are not convinced of this, you cannot evangelize. You have to go on abandoning yourself to the Lord. Are there many difficulties and problems? Is the vicar against you? This is the least that can happen: whether it is the parochial vicar or a right wing or a left wing group... Who will the Lord prepare for you? We don't know. Anything can happen. You must tell the pastor that it won't all be milk and honey. He mustn't think that this is a catechetical course that you are going to give some little lectures: first conference, second conference... This wouldn't be the Gospel! Here there is a big mess, as though nothing were happening... And moreover, God knows what he is doing. Just think that in Madrid they have thrown us out of twelve parishes. We failed in twelve parishes, and despite this the Way has spread and solidified.

Other times instead, it is the Lord himself who closes the door (see Acts 16:7; Col 4:3). He doesn't want a community to be formed and at the end people don't come. Courage, it's not a problem.

If giving the catechesis makes you very afraid, it's thanks to God. For if you're not afraid you can't evangelize. The catechist who is not afraid, who goes calmly to give the catechesis... It's like going to a bullfight. Do you know any bullfighter who, after being a bullfighter for many years, isn't afraid before the fight? Fine, if he isn't afraid then there are two possibilities: either there isn't really a bull there or he's crazy. As for the catechesis, if you're not afraid, there are two possibilities: either you're crazy or there is not really any announcement of the Gospel. The enemy, the devils, are not really there. The people come to listen with all the devils.

Because, clearly, what makes you afraid is that you don't know what the people listening to you will come out with, you don't know what will happen. I began to give the catechesis and someone in the third row got up: Shut up, you fool! Or someone else may stand up: This isn't true! Or perhaps no one comes. Then this really is the bull.

Giving catecheses is not a game and the priests, the pastors, know this too. And bless God that he calls you to evangelize, to lose your life in this. If you are afraid, you always go with a bit of an upset stomach. And now, it's time to go. What will happen today? Yesterday 80 people came, when we were afraid that no one would come. Perhaps today no one will come. It has happened many times that 80 people came to the first meeting, 4 to the second and no one to the third. Other times it's the opposite: 40 at the first, 60 at the second, and you end up with 200.

We know nothing. It's God who leads the catechesis because he knows what that parish is like and knows what it needs. God, who knows Madrid very well, knows the drug situation, the problems, the thieves, the lies, the enormous sins there are, knows what Madrid needs. There is no need for an angel to come down from heaven and put up some diagrams here and explain them to us: this is how the catechesis will go in this parish. He does sociological projections and after five hours of work says to us: do you agree that what is needed is a small community of ten people so that the pastor can see?

We don't need these explanations because through faith we are in communion with the Spirit of the Lord. We have the Holy Spirit and we know this by faith. We know that ten people will go on in that parish because that's what's needed, given the concrete situation of the pastor and the parochial vicars, or given the situation of the parish. This is what's needed at this time. This is so that you keep calm.

All you need to do is to offer your bodies in a spiritual worship, as St. Paul says (see Rom 12:1), in a cult, in a liturgy. St. Paul calls the evangelization a cult, a liturgy, a spiritual cult (see Rom 1:9).

I was saying that to catechize you need to give your life because success (if you want to call it that, for there is not such a thing as success in Christianity) is born from the cross. And where is the cross carried? In our bodies. If you don't carry the cross in your body, my brother, don't imagine that you are announcing anything. Maybe the young man in the team who is the cantor goes to show off as cantor. But it's not about that, is it? Look what St. Paul says: We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and we are your servants for Jesus (see 2 Cor 4:5).

Since you are servants, be at his service. Do you need to wear a cassock? Fine, wear a cassock. Do what needs to be done, brothers and sisters. Go there to serve, to give your life for the brothers and sisters. Don't think that you're going there to waste time, because if you do, you're not catechists. "I'm going to do a little thing for the Lord. Is it necessary to give catecheses? Fine, I'll go to give catecheses but if it takes up too much time, I'm not going." The person with this attitude, brothers and sisters, doesn't know what we are doing or why we are here. It's not a matter of doing a little thing for God, no. To evangelize is an immense gift that God has given you that he has found you worthy to do. St. Paul says: He has found me worthy to announce the Gospel, me who was an abortion, who persecuted the Church (see 1 Tim 1:12-14).

Yes, to announce the Gospel is the biggest thing there is. He has put into my hands the biggest treasure there is: to give my life so that a married couple is brought together again, a marriage that was on the point of destruction. Because of your stupid words their children will be saved; an adulterous woman will leave her adultery; sinners will be converted; people will be saved; they will be happy. To you, who have been a sinner all your life, a fool, lazy, to you God gives the biggest thing there is, which is to announce the Gospel. If you don't value this, it will quickly be taken away from you and given to someone else. If you despise it, if you don't care about evangelizing, it will be taken away from you and given to someone else who appreciates it and knows what a great thing this is. How marvelous it is that Jesus Christ goes with you and brings you on his chariot of fire and says: Come with me. We're going to set fire to the world! To go through life, saving people. To see Jesus Christ appear in your catecheses, to see that communities are formed, to see that people begin to be saved.

I'll tell you something. In Rome we had a pastor who couldn't bear us and wanted to throw us out. At the end, do you know how he was converted? One day the catechists of his community (he was a new pastor with prejudices) invited him to a village near Rome where they were giving catecheses to which 80 people were coming. Half of these people began to argue with the team, to laugh at them. When this pastor saw the atmosphere, the devils which were there, the hostility, he saw with his own eyes that this little group of catechists from his community whom he had always attacked, whom he had said were exaggerated, didn't know how to talk, talked heresy or whatever, overcame the devils and the people were converted. The young people who had laughed

at them entered the community. In other words, Jesus Christ accompanied the catechists and this poor pastor saw enormous miracles done by these poor souls whom he had attacked and persecuted.

St. Paul goes on saying: "The same God who said: from darkness let the light shine..." (see 2 Cor 4:6). When did God say: "From darkness let the light shine"? When in Genesis he created the world, the universe. With his word God said: "From darkness let the light shine" and there was light (see Gen 1:3). Through his word this God has made the light shine in our hearts; it is the same God who will speak through you. How is it possible that you lend him your mouth if maybe you swear and blaspheme and have talked dirty, how is it possible? How is it possible that from our mouths comes forth the creative word that creates new life, eternal life, in man? Because the same God who said: "Let there be life" and the light was, is the same God who will say to the darkness with which someone comes to the catechesis - who comes along black, hating his wife and wanting to kill her; and that other person who has come for what other reason I don't know, because he is destroyed and doesn't accept himself - this same God will say a word to the darkness in his heart, through you, with your word. He will come and make light in his heart. Because the same thing happened to you in the catechesis; I don't know whether at the fifth or the seventh or in the convivence, when God wanted. He made the light shine in our hearts to light up the knowledge of the glory of God that is on the face of Christ. However we carry this treasure in earthen vessels to show that such an extraordinary love comes from God and not from us (see 2 Cor 4:6-7).

This is why many times in the catechesis it is very clear to everyone that you are poor people, who are not preaching yourselves, that what is happening in the catechesis is not your work, it does not come from people who have studied a lot of group techniques, sociology, psychology, how you should shout and how not to, how to lead a group, how to brainwash. Nothing, you have studied nothing of this. You are not there to manage the people, or to manipulate their psychology or their consciences. So that it is clearly seen by everyone that the strength comes from God and not from us, God shows your weakness to everyone, shows that you are weak, that you still don't have much faith, that you are imperfect, that you argue, that you are not plaster saints, even seen from far away.

"In difficulties on all sides but not cast down" (see 2 Cor 4:8). In other words, in the catechesis there are difficulties. "Often cast down." Do you realize now what is happening, when, for example, the pastor says he doesn't want to go on? Cast down, but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, often defeated, but not annihilated. We carry always in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that the Life of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies (see 2 Cor 4:8-10).

Because, clearly, if they are attacking, persecuting and insulting you, and you don't defend yourself - it's what Christ did, isn't it? - but you let yourself be persecuted, attacked, insulted, then what does this announce? Either you are an idiot and a coward, or you are a disciple of Christ. Christ is alive

inside you giving you life and saying to you: My son, put up with it, don't worry, carry my cross in your body, don't throw it away it now, don't run away from the cross, don't punch that person, because then you end up saying that what I have done is worth nothing. Punching that fellow ends up with shouting: "Barabbas saves." (He was a guerrilla, someone who was engaged in politics and violent struggle against social injustice.) "This is what saves. Christ saves nothing." You yourself have denied him. When someone has done you an injustice, you did not let yourself be killed as he did, you did not imitate him, you did not follow him. The disciples of Christ imitate Christ. They are his disciples because they follow his footsteps.

You don't want to follow me, you don't want to do what I do, because you don't agree. You don't say: "This is what saves the world." You say: "Barabbas saves the world." So leave us, go away and join a communist group and raise your fist, do what they all do: strength united against oppression. Shout this and say that Christ saves no one. Say it, say it forcefully: this is useless! Because you don't want to put this into practice. If we want to put this into practice, brothers and sisters, the Spirit of Jesus has been given to us. Jesus rose to give it to us. So don't get angry and if you do, ask for forgiveness immediately. We have been put here for this, to shine, to carry the death of Jesus in our bodies so that it can be seen in our bodies that Christ is alive, that he saves, that we love the enemy.

But how can you say that Christ loves a wretch, loves an evil man? How can you say this? St. Francis say: by loving him. And do you love a wicked man who when he is near you, does harm to you? For he is wicked, that's why no one goes near him. He is lazy, shameless, a rogue, he lies, is someone who will exploit you as much as he can, a thief, a liar, bad.

Jesus Christ loved us when we were wicked, when we did wrong. We killed him (see Rom 5:6-8). Despite this, when we were bad, he gave his blood for us, so that now... There are always bad people beside us, many times all of us are bad, and we constantly crucify the other person. The husband crucifies the wife and the wife the husband. At work the boss crucifies you, and you the boss. And the children, the brother-in-law, the aunt, whoever. It is a constant reality. We are imperfect. And when we are bad, who can announce to us that despite this, Jesus loves, that he loves us. It's very simple. If Christ lives in me and loves this brother who has been my enemy, Jesus will bring me to tell him that he loves him because faith tells me that Christ loves this brother whose head I'd like to split open. For there are people whose heads you'd like to split open...

You judge him and it's not good to judge. Charity excuses everything. The person who judges is sinning. There are people who spend their lives pointing their fingers at everyone to justify themselves. These people mustn't think they have the spirit of Christ. "Do not judge" (Mt 7:1). What do you know about another person? Don't judge. Don't judge anyone. Forgive. This is what the Gospel says, doesn't it? Charity excuses everything, bears everything (see 1 Cor 13:7). But nevertheless we judge continually. There, we sin. You should know that every time you judge, you sin. Why do you judge your brother? Jesus

did not call us to judge. Leave others to judge. The Lord has called us for something else. He has called us to carry in our bodies the injustice done by others and to leave judgment to God.

Jesus will be the judge. He is the one who can judge (see Acts 10:42). He has opened a way for us. He has told us: See how you should live. As I live, so should you live... I am the only one who can judge. I can judge murderers because I have not murdered anyone. I can judge the drunks because I have never been drunk. I can judge adulterers because I have never committed adultery. I can judge everyone, I am the Lord, I am the Holy One. He is the Holy One. He can judge and he did not want to judge, he left judgment to the Father, to the eschatological time (see Jn 3:18). Just think, brothers and sisters, that to live like that is a bomb in Madrid. This is what the Lord is calling us to, to live like that, to live this.

To finish, let's talk about the announcement in the church. You know that you do the announcement after the homily. The pastor or the priest who is presiding must introduce you to the parishioners. He gives the homily - a little shorter than usual, if possible - and then, taking occasion of the Word, introduces you. Draw lots to see who does the announcement at all the different Masses in the parish, starting from Saturday night until Sunday night.

You will suffer a bit for the evangelization speaking in front of everyone during the Mass. And how do you speak? Go there and say: my name is so and so, etc.

You have to make a big poster, a good one. You can design it. The Lord will inspire you. A big poster that says: "NEOCATECHUMENATE. If you feel oppressed, if you are suffering, etc., the Lord is coming to free you," or something of the sort. I did a poster that said that in the primitive Church the apostles preached and Jesus accompanied them in the preaching. Now the apostles are coming to this parish and Jesus will be present in the catechesis. This is important. There will be miracles, the blind will see, etc. People will be freed. The Lord will inspire you. You should do it with the pastor because the pastor knows the parishioners better. Usually we do a poster that attracts attention, at least enough for the pastor to say, at the beginning of Mass: have you seen this poster that announces the catechesis next Tuesday at such and such a time? Afterwards he invites everyone and then says: I will ask the catechist to say something.

A catechist mustn't appear on his own. Introduce all the team. All the team should sit in the presbyterium or nearby and one of you speaks. Don't go on your own; the team must always be there. The Lord sent the apostles two by two (see Lk 10:1). It's necessary to be in two's because love is there. Sit in the front row (you have to suffer for love of the Gospel) and the brother whose turn it is to speak, what does he say? Well, what God inspires you to say. Give some testimony and say what the catechesis will be about. Say: my name is... Say what God has done with you, invite them to come, announce Jesus Christ to them. The Lord will inspire you.

To do the announcement in the church you have to be united to the Lord. Afterwards, you can eat together. Throw yourselves in the parish without being afraid, without giving lectures to the people, with humility, witnessing to what God has done with you and saying that the Lord will accompany you, not because of your virtue, but that you have seen that Jesus accompanies his apostles and that he will be present.

Then say: if there is someone here who is suffering, who has problems in the family, come, because faith comes from preaching. Faith is the meeting with the risen Christ who frees us from slavery to evil, from selfishness, because of the fear that we have of death we are under slavery to evil (Heb 2:24-1). In other words, you can announce the kerygma. The Lord will inspire you.

Your community can do a day of fasting, skipping a meal, before the catechesis begins so that the community is united to your giving the catechesis. Ask the community to help you, because you are scared to death, especially those who are evangelizing for the first time and need the support of the community. Agree among yourselves on a day that all the community will fast, and before breaking the fast you can meet and pray vespers with the community and pray for the catechesis. Afterwards, during the catechesis, keep them informed of how the catechesis is going. This matter of the fasting isn't a law. It's a way for the community to be united to you.

After this meeting that we're having with you before beginning the catechesis, we'll have another after the penitential celebration and another when you've finished the catechesis. Let us pray.

APPENDIX 2MEETING WITH THE CATECHISTS
ABOUT VISITS TO THE COMMUNITIES BEFORE THE 1st SCRUTINY*(Madrid, October 1981)*

(Kiko)

Once the community has begun you need to keep yourself informed of how things are going.

After six months, or earlier, if necessary, have a first convivence of a day and a half, if possible, during which you celebrate the Eucharist, then at Lauds you call the brothers and sisters to faith with the kerygma, then you listen for a while to the community and give a catechesis on the Way, with reference to the problems the brothers and sisters have. In this catechesis you need to underline the fact that the precatechumenate is above all a time of kenosis. God, through the Word and the brothers and sisters of the community who are a mirror of their own defects and sins, little by little is making us discover our true reality, so often hidden by a mask because we want to be accepted by others. In this way God allows our preconceived ideas of what the community "should be" to crumble. With regard to this, you can take some ideas from *"Life Together"* by Bonhoeffer. This convivence helps the brothers and sisters who are very young in the way. As you know the precatechumenate is a very difficult time. You've all gone through it.

A year later, more or less, have another convivence, of a day and a half, in which you announce the first scrutiny and correct any mistakes that there always are in the communities.

You must tell the responsible to invite everyone to the convivence. Always, when the catechists come to visit, the responsible must invite all the community, including the people who haven't been coming for a while. If he says to you: "Look, we were forty and now we're ten," tell him not to worry. It doesn't mean that only those ten will go on. Many people will come back when they know the catechists are coming. Maybe they don't trust anyone in the community but they do still trust the catechists. As catechists you must have this very clear.

So say to the responsible: We're going to have a convivence on such and such a Sunday, at such and such a place. Invite all the brothers and sisters. "But they won't come." "Tell all the brothers and sisters that the catechists are coming and that we've told you to invite everyone." Then you catechists telephone those who say they're not coming. It's enough for you to call and their hearts soften at the thought that the catechists are concerned about them and have called them. Because they trust you. From the catechists they received a word that reached them in the catechesis. This is very important.

When we go to Paris, for example, the first thing we do is to see the "lost sheep." We ask about who isn't coming. The work with the "lost sheep" is very difficult and is done gradually. The shepherd is Jesus Christ, without a doubt. But at this

moment you are doing the work of the shepherd. There are people who have been badly wounded in life and trust no one. They've been beaten up. They trust Jesus Christ a little; they began to trust Jesus Christ in the convivence. They need a lot of patience and affection.

It's also very important that you always do things in communion with the parish priest. Visit him. Love him. If at the beginning he doesn't understand some things about the way, explain to him as best you can and invite him to have patience and then he will harvest the fruits.

When you visit the community you must always announce the kerygma, you must call to conversion. You must announce Jesus Christ with strength, saying: Look, Jesus Christ has saved you, has given his life for you, each of you. You must say: "He is risen for your salvation. Why have you abandoned him? Turn back to him!" You must say always, believing it: TURN BACK TO HIM! If you don't believe it and are in crisis, then don't go to give catechesis. And say it without making demands. In the Way we never demand anything. We become corrupt if we make demands about things we ourselves can't do. To call to conversion is not to demand anything. It is to announce the love that God has for them. You must always announce the kerygma.

Another thing you must be careful about is if there is some problem. Always, at the beginning, there can be problems: fornication, real messes, etc. Don't be scandalized. Thank God a case like this is one in a thousand, but it is normal between men and women, there have always been problems and there always will be.

But you need to know how to make distinctions and to discern. Above all the responsible must not be a moralist. If the responsible is a moralist, it will ruin the community. We have seen communities that were destroyed because the responsible would not let anyone make a mistake or be weak, in any way, and because he would not allow any argument in the convivence. "No argument here. Here we should love each other. We must love each other!" It's the end. The young people all disappeared, etc. You see? That is what making demands leads to. There was no sincerity in the community. As you know the way is based on humility and humility is the truth. If there is no truth in the community, there is nothing.

This business of not being moralistic doesn't mean: "Do what you like!" and that to sin is nothing. Absolutely not, you know that sin provokes in man the loss of grace; the separation of our life from God provokes death in us. I don't know if you know it: sin gives us death. If someone is in sin, he is dead, he stinks, is an infection in our midst, he doesn't have the life of God here, he doesn't have it. He doesn't have life, is dead, is in the power of the spirits of darkness who have power over him and his will; the desires of the flesh are stronger than he is, he cannot overcome them because he is without the life of God. The man who is slave to evil, slave to sin, is in a sad condition, suffering. Sad is his condition. This is the a b c's of Christianity.

Jesus Christ came to free us from the slavery that man suffers under sin and evil. The person who has known interior freedom, doesn't want to sin, because the Holy Spirit defends him from sin. The Spirit says: Be careful! Because with the Holy Spirit come his gifts and one of these is the holy fear of God. Clearly, those who don't have the Holy Spirit don't have the holy fear of God and for them to sin is not sin. The fear of God is a gift that comes from heaven. It is a marvelous thing that preserves you and makes you think five, six, fifty times before sinning. It makes you think very clearly because it knows what it means to sin: to kill Christ, to kill God. Sin causes in you, my brother, many evils in your life, it separates you completely from God and you remain in darkness. And what will your life become? We don't know what can happen to you.

We must learn to get out of sin, to fight, to enter into combat. This is why St. Paul says: Clothe yourselves with the armor of light (see Rom 13:12; Eph 6:10-17). There are invisible weapons that the Christian has. Today there is a lot of talk about science fiction where it is as though you could put on armor that is invisible but that protects you. You know the song we've made about the "Armor of light." St. Paul says: gird your loins with the truth. The truth is Christ. You must obey him and no one else. He is the Lord. The truth is not the world, or what your mother or father say, or what politics thinks. He and the Gospel are the truth. For the person who wants to obey the Gospel (what the Gospel says), this is the truth. Gird your loins with the truth, as St. Paul says. And the truth in every sense, without lying to each other; in the truth that is humility. The truth is that we are poor, and woe to us if the Lord takes his hand away from us. I, brothers and sisters, am as poor as you, a sinner. I have constant temptations of all sorts: sexual, of pride, of all kinds. Who will free me? Who will free me from these temptations? If they lay a trap for me, I fall. If they put a girl in my way, I fall, I will fall. But I say: "Lord, don't let it happen. I trust in you. Don't let me enter into this situation. Preserve me. Guide me!" And he preserves me, he doesn't leave me. If he were to leave me...

"Lord, don't abandon me! You allowed me to get to know this girl, to put me in that situation, or I don't know what. Don't abandon me." It doesn't depend just on ourselves, you understand? It's not that I don't sin just because I decide not to do so, just because of that. No, it's because I hope in the Lord. Trust in the Lord, trust in Him, trust that He will save you, trust in Him. Say with the psalmist: I will not waver, Lord, your hand protects me. I will not waver (see Ps 17:5; 62:3,7). As the other psalm says: I lift up my eyes to the mountains. From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He is at your right hand so that you do not waver. He protects you with his shadow so that the sun will not harm you by day, or the moon by night.

I trusted and the Lord saved me. And when I saw I was in a mess and thought I was already lost... No! I'm not lost! Lord I don't know how to get out of this, but I will get out. The Lord is my father and will help me. This is where we want to bring you, to the trust that the Holy Spirit gives you. And we will

come through; of course we will come through. The just man has many trials but the Lord frees him from them all, from them all (see Ps 34:20). And what joy when the Lord frees you! The Lord also frees other people from many trials but the problem is that they don't see this and they don't have the joy of seeing that someone loves them. And without love, brothers and sisters, we don't live. And so they take refuge in the love of the family or the love of a friend, and they find themselves in such failures, scared. They don't know where to find love.

With this I want to say to you also that you must be very clear about something: it is true that this is a way for sinners, a way for the sick. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick... I came not to call the just but the sinners" (Mt 9:12-13). But be careful about the Eucharist. This comes down from the oldest tradition of the Church: the Eucharist is the Body of the Lord and we can destroy this Body and condemn ourselves (see 1 Cor 11:27-32).

However, it's clear that we cannot go around with a flashlight asking: Listen, do you have a girlfriend, do you fornicate, do you take the pill? The Church does not do this. She does not ask these things of the people who come to Mass. But if it happens that it becomes known in the community (because at the end these things usually come to light) that someone in living in a concrete situation of serious sin, you must talk to this person and this person cannot take communion. Very calmly, helping him, with affection, you must say to him: You can come to the Eucharist, but you know that in this situation you cannot put your hand out to take communion. No one judges you. We are a people, aren't we? We are not in a community of nuns where if someone doesn't take communion the others will think: what sin can she have? That girl doesn't take communion and the others think: What big sin can she have committed? It's not a question of this.

You have to be very clear about this. If there is some brother or sister in an irregular situation, because he is divorced or has a problem of adultery... There is a time in the way when we will speak expressly about adultery because adultery is a very serious sin, a mortal sin, which destroys. Remember what St. Paul says to the community. For this can happen in the community. The devil can enter into this.

This is why St. Paul says: If someone is destroying the Body of Christ, God will destroy him (see 1 Cor 3:17). He's talking, for example, about someone who starts to look at the wife of his neighbor in the community and so to destroy the Body of Christ. This would be a cause of scandal for all the brothers and sisters outside and would do terrible damage. It destroys the temple of God that is the Church, the Body of Jesus Christ. If you have destroyed the Body of Jesus Christ, God will destroy you because behind you are peoples' lives, behind this is the life of a small child. It is playing with peoples' lives and it destroys the Church. And if the Church is destroyed, what will we raise up before the world so that men can meet the light? You don't play with this, brothers and sisters. What God says, he will bring to fulfillment exactly. This and many other things.

But at the same time don't be afraid. In a convivence of responsables from Rome, a sister, after the penitential, said publicly that she still couldn't forgive. She had been in the way for four years, she had done the Shema, and she said that she couldn't forgive some sisters in the community. She no longer went to the community but had come to the convivence because we had said to invite her. At the Eucharist, during the echoes, she stood up to say this. I told her that if she couldn't forgive, she couldn't take communion. (You can't make the Body of the Lord into a pantomime.)

Then a brother got up to give his experience. He said that the year before he had been the responsible of a community, married to a fat, ugly wife, who had a head a bit like this and they had two children. He had found himself a young, pretty girlfriend. But his life wasn't easy. (His wife knew about what was going on and so did the children.) And he explained how, when I knew that he was the responsible, that he had been in the community for a year and half without resolving the situation, I had said to him: "I'm very sorry, but in this situation, the first thing is that from today onwards you are no longer the responsible. Secondly, you can't take communion." This brother said that at the time he was upset and not pleased and said to me: "But, Kiko, I thought that this was something for the second scrutiny and I've only just begun. I joined the community because my brother, who was an atheistic communist, converted and now he is a marvel, completely changed." He explained that I had said to him: "Whatever you say; but if you want to follow the way, I've told you what you must do." This brother got up at the convivence and gave his experience to encourage that lady. He, who couldn't stand his wife, who detested her with all his soul, twice tried to leave the girlfriend. Afterwards he had a crisis and went back to her. Then he came to speak to me and I told him what he must do. I sent him to a monastery to pray and fast. There the Lord gave him the strength to change his life.

We'll speak again about these things, about what you need to do with certain brothers and sisters who are sick and need to be put in the hospital. It's not enough to give them an aspirin or another pill, or that they go to confession just like that, because they will not be cured like that. There are people who are so sick that they need to be "hospitalized." They need to go to a monastery to pray and fast and to have everyone pray for them.

"But, Kiko, I'm soft. I'm afraid of life, bourgeois, I can't stand my history. As soon as I'm afraid, I take refuge in whatever escape the world offers me." "No, my friend, you can suffer, you can suffer perfectly well. Do you want to be cured or not? Fine, then we'll tell you how to be cured."

This brother got up to say that for a year and a half he had been back living with his wife. She was unrecognizable. She had lost weight and was looking much younger and more beautiful. He had fallen in love again with his wife. They have two big children. The last one is fourteen years old and now they're expecting a third. Miracles of this sort; things that seemed insoluble!

One thing I want to say to you, brothers and sisters. You're a catechist, aren't you? I want to say something very important. We have been called into the world to do the impossible. The pagans, the gentiles, call them what you want, have been called to do what it is possible for man to do, you understand this? It's possible for man, using his reason, to do many things: build bridges, send a sputnik to the moon. We're called to do the impossible, what man can't do, what only God can do. So when you find yourself in front of an impossible situation, DON'T DOUBT!

"But look, this girl is divorced and now she's had three children with this man, with whom she's been living for three years... It's impossible!" God solves the impossible, what is impossible for men. If you have faith like this mustard seed, tell this mountain... (see Mt 17:20). Do you know what the mountain means? A very big problem. In psychological language a mountain means a problem. Say to this mountain: "move," and it will move, it will obey you. Nothing is impossible for God, absolutely nothing. To me, brothers and sisters, this has given great results. I found myself with an insoluble problem. There is no human solution but there is a divine solution because what is impossible for man is possible for God (see Lk 1:37; Mk 10:27). And God gets results. Miracles, immense miracles, real miracles. This is something that you must have absolutely clear; otherwise you are no good as catechists.

The Lord is calling you to work in his vineyard with a great mystery, a marvelous one, a ministry of justice, let's call it. You must put yourself in front of human suffering and you must act. I have always had immense trust and I've experienced that, if the Lord sends you, he acts. I've seen very weak young people who, when they had to do the second scrutiny as catechists, I don't know how, the Lord inspired them. They saw the Lord appear and they had sweetness and tenderness, they said things that saved the people. Because it is the Lord who is loving the one who is in front of you, and for love of this poor soul who has managed to get himself into the way - who knows how? - the Lord acts.

Another idea you must have very clear is that it is not you but the Lord who acts. In every ministry it is the Lord who takes our poor good intentions and uses them and does miracles. It is he who acts in us.

This is a school for catechists. These are ideas that you must have clear because they are the heart of the problem. If you don't have this clear, what's the point in talking about the need to do first or second scrutinies?

When there are problems, make decisions with the priest of your team of catechists. When there are serious moral problems, go to the parish priest with the priest of the team. If he isn't in the way, perhaps there might be some difficulty, but the Lord will help you and will show you what to do. However with this sort of thing, let yourselves be advised by the parish priest, trusting in his ministry, in his mission as head. This is why it's important that in every team of catechists there is a presbyter.

You need to look after the communities that haven't yet done the first scrutiny, especially if the numbers drop, for whatever reason. The Lord will teach you. There's no need to insist: pay attention to the sheep that might get lost because of your lack of care!

It can happen sometimes that, not because of the catechists' bad intentions, things are said a bit too strongly, or using a language that the other person doesn't know how to interpret, or interprets badly, etc. A proverb says that if somebody takes it too personal he has a guilty conscience. By how a person replies you can see what he has inside. Because if some one has a spirit that comes from God, he excuses you, because he sees your good intention. If he has heard something you have said as too radical and doesn't understand it, he doesn't judge you, but comes to you and says: Listen, explain what you said because I didn't understand it.

Jesus Christ says that he speaks in parables, sometimes very harshly, "so that seeing they will not see and hearing not hear" (see Mt 13:10-13). Because according to how people interpret the parable you can see what is in the heart of those listening. "I didn't say this; you are saying it - Jesus Christ could say. I told this parable. Why are you interpreting it like this?" (see Jn 2:19-22). "See how strange. See what badness you have imputed to the words I said. There can be seen what is in your heart. This is not to be interpreted in that way."

Sometimes this can happen to you because a catechist has to say the truth. This is why St. Paul says: Pray for me so that I speak with courage (see Eph 6:9). It has always been a characteristic of the Church to tell the truth without being afraid of anyone, not even the emperor. For example, St. Ambrose says to the emperor: "You will not enter the church because you went to that city and killed five thousand men." And St. Ambrose knew he was risking his head. The bishops were the first to tell the truth, to put God before any man, without sweetening the pill for anyone. And this is always the fruit of freedom. There is always a price to pay for this. It is much easier to hide our heads in the sand and say nothing. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't show delicacy.

An important thing is that the responsible is in communion with you and is faithful to the way. Because, if the community does the tripod, even if there are problems, it will go on without collapsing.

A frequent problem is punctuality. Some people can't stand starting late and begin to be demanding: "There's no charity here, because you're latecomers, etc." Be careful not to judge the brothers and sisters' intentions, thinking that they come late because they don't want to be punctual, because they are not charitable towards others. Instead, make excuses for them. Maybe it was the traffic. Maybe they have small children and until they put them to bed they can't come. Make excuses for them and you'll be doing the right thing. Do you know why you're doing the right thing if you're making excuses for them? Because the Word of God says so "Charity excuses everything" (see 1 Cor 13:7). And the Word of God is never wrong.

This doesn't mean that to be charitable means to be an idiot, that to excuse everything means to do things stupidly. This is false. This is honey, that is nothing like authentic charity.

Another problem is the desire for efficiency on the part of some people who get annoyed because the brothers and sisters have arrived and the celebration has still not begun. You need to realize that the problem is that we don't meet each other often and we need to begin to relate to each other. The liturgies aren't enough. We aren't in a factory: the liturgy starts at eight sharp and then at the end it's time to go home. So you see that after the celebration too, the brothers and sisters wait on for a time to talk. Talking is fundamental. Communicating with other people is a necessity that you have to understand.

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