

# The Eucharist, sacrament of love

## *Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI*

On March 13, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI released his second major document, an apostolic exhortation called "Sacramentum Caritatis" (Sacrament of Charity) that reflects the conclusions of the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome from Oct. 2 to 23, 2005. The document, dated February 22, the Feast of the Chair of Peter, is also the logical continuation of Pope Benedict's first Encyclical Letter, "Deus Caritas Est" (God is love), since we are dealing now with the "sacrament of love", the Eucharist.

The text is divided into three sections, each one of which considers one of the three dimensions of the Eucharist. The sections are entitled: "The Eucharist, a mystery to be believed," "The Eucharist, a mystery to be celebrated," and "The Eucharist, a mystery to be lived." Here are excerpts from this important document:

### **by Pope Benedict XVI**

The sacrament of charity (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*), the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God's infinite love for every man and



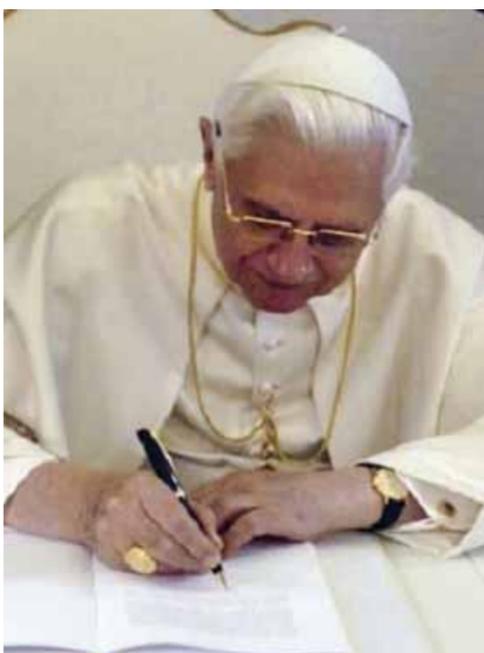
for truth and freedom. Since only the truth can make us free (cf. Jn 8:32), Christ becomes for us the food of truth. (...) Saint Augustine went on to say: "What does our soul desire more passionately than truth?"

Each of us has an innate and irrepressible desire for ultimate and definitive truth. The Lord Jesus, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), speaks to our thirsting, pilgrim hearts, our hearts yearning for the source of life, our hearts longing for truth. Jesus Christ is the Truth in person, drawing the world to himself. (...) In the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus shows us in particular the truth about the love which is the very essence of God.

### **The Eucharist, a mystery to be believed**

"The mystery of faith!" With these words, spoken immediately after the words of consecration, the priest proclaims the mystery being celebrated and expresses his wonder before the substantial change of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, a reality which surpasses all human

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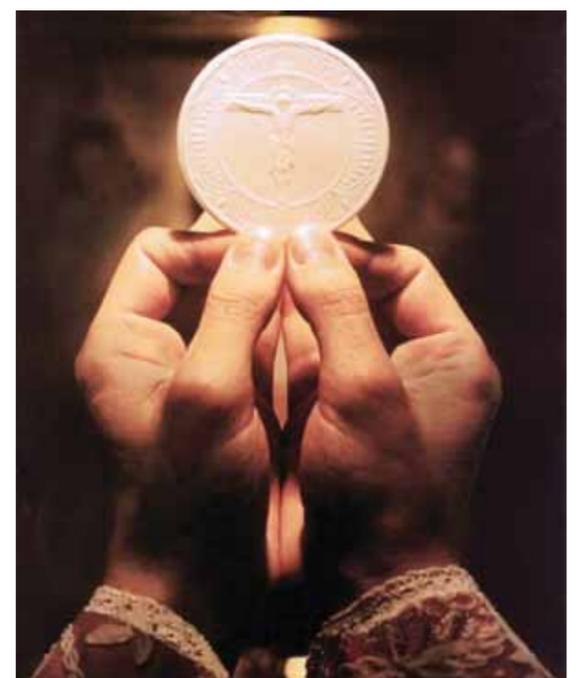


woman. This wondrous sacrament makes manifest that "greater" love which led him to "lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).

Jesus continues, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, to love us "to the end," even to offering us his body and his blood. What amazement must the Apostles have felt in witnessing what the Lord did and said during that Supper! What wonder must the eucharistic mystery also awaken in our own hearts!

### **The food of truth**

In the sacrament of the altar, the Lord meets us, men and women created in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27), and becomes our companion along the way. In this sacrament, the Lord truly becomes food for us, to satisfy our hunger



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understanding. The Eucharist is a "mystery of faith" par excellence: "the sum and summary of our faith." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1327.)

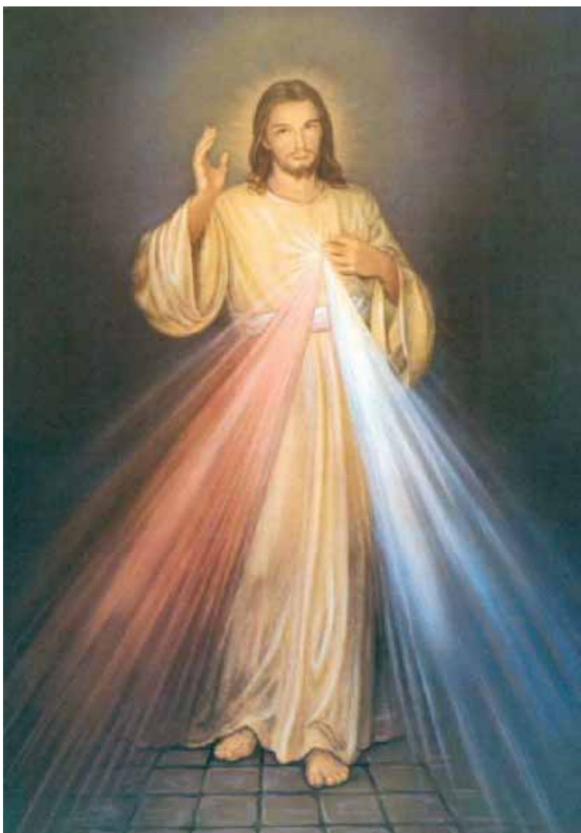
## A free gift of the Blessed Trinity



The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history (cf. Eph 1:10; 3:8-11). There the *Deus Trinitas*, who is essentially love (cf. 1 Jn 4:7-8), becomes fully a part of our human condition. In the bread and wine under whose appearances Christ gives himself to us in the paschal meal (cf. Lk 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26), God's whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us. God is a perfect communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At creation itself, man was called to have some share in God's breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). But it is in Christ, dead and risen, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, given without measure (cf. Jn 3:34), that we have become sharers of God's inmost life. (16) Jesus Christ, who "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God" (Heb 9:14), makes us, in the gift of the Eucharist, sharers in God's own life.

(...) In the mystery of Christ's obedience unto death, even death on a Cross (cf. Phil 2:8), the new and eternal covenant was brought about. In his crucified flesh, God's freedom and our human freedom met definitively in an inviolable, eternally valid pact.



## The Eucharist and the Church

Through the sacrament of the Eucharist Jesus draws the faithful into his "hour;" he shows us the bond that he willed to establish between himself and us, between his own person and the Church. Indeed, in the sacrifice of the Cross, Christ gave birth to the Church as his Bride and his body.

The Fathers of the Church often meditated on the relationship between Eve's coming forth from the side of Adam as he slept (cf. Gen 2:21-23) and the coming forth of the new Eve, the Church, from the open side of Christ sleeping in death: from Christ's pierced side, John recounts, there came forth blood and water (cf. Jn 19:34), the symbol of the sacraments.

## The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation



The Synod Fathers rightly stated that a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Given the connection between these sacraments, an authentic catechesis on the meaning of the Eucharist must include the call to pursue the path of penance (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-29).

We know that the faithful are surrounded by a culture that tends to eliminate the sense of sin and to promote a superficial approach that overlooks the need to be in a state of grace in order to approach sacramental communion worthily. (Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1385.)

The Synod recalled that Bishops have the pastoral duty of promoting within their Dioceses a reinvigorated catechesis on the conversion born of the Eucharist, and of encouraging frequent confession among the faithful. All priests should dedicate themselves with generosity, commitment and competency to administering the sacrament of Reconciliation.

**In this regard, it is important that the confessionals in our churches should be clearly visible expressions of the importance of this sacrament. I ask pastors to be vigilant with regard to the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, and to limit the practice of general absolution exclusively to the cases permitted (cf. John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei*, April 7, 2002), since individual absolution is the only form intended for ordinary use.**

## The Eucharist and priestly celibacy

The Synod Fathers wished to emphasize that the ministerial priesthood, through ordination, calls for complete configuration to Christ. (...) The fact that Christ himself, the eternal priest, lived his mission even to the sacrifice of the Cross in the state of virginity constitutes the sure point of reference for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church. It is not sufficient to understand priestly celibacy in purely functional terms. Celibacy is really a special way of conforming oneself to Christ's own way of life.

This choice has first and foremost a nuptial meaning; it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for his Bride. In continuity with the great ecclesial tradition, with the Second Vatican Council and with my predecessors in the papacy, I reaffirm the beauty and the importance of a priestly life lived in celibacy as a sign expressing total and exclusive devotion to Christ, to the Church and to the Kingdom of God, and I therefore confirm that it remains obligatory in the Latin tradition. Priestly celibacy lived with maturity, joy and dedication is an immense blessing for the Church and for society itself.

## The Eucharist, a mystery to be celebrated

In the course of the Synod, there was frequent insistence on the need to avoid any antithesis between the *ars celebrandi*, the art of proper celebration, and the full, active and fruitful participation of all the faithful. The primary way to foster the participation of the People of God in the sacred rite is the proper celebration of the rite itself. The *ars celebrandi* is the best way to ensure their *actuosa participatio*.



The *ars celebrandi* is the fruit of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness; indeed, for two thousand years this way of celebrating has sustained the faith life of all believers, called to take part in the celebration as the People of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (cf. 1 Pet 2:4-5, 9).

The *ars celebrandi* should foster a sense of the sacred and the use of outward signs which help to cultivate this sense, such as, for example, the harmony of the rite, the liturgical vestments, the furnishings and the sacred space.

Everything related to the Eucharist should be marked by beauty. Special respect and care must also be given to the vestments, the furnishings and the sacred vessels, so that by their harmonious and orderly arrangement they will foster awe for the mystery of God, manifest the unity of the faith and strengthen devotion.

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## Liturgical song

In the *ars celebrandi*, liturgical song has a pre-eminent place. Saint Augustine rightly says in a famous sermon that “the new man sings a new song. Singing is an expression of joy and, if we consider the matter, an expression of love”.



The People of God assembled for the liturgy sings the praises of God. In the course of her two-thousand-year history, the Church has created, and still creates, music and songs which represent a rich patrimony of faith and love. This heritage must not be lost. Certainly as far as the liturgy is concerned, we cannot say that one song is as good as another. Generic improvisation or the introduction of musical genres which fail to respect the meaning of the liturgy should be avoided.

As an element of the liturgy, song should be well integrated into the overall celebration. Consequently everything – texts, music, execution – ought to correspond to the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, the structure of the rite and the liturgical seasons. Finally, while respecting various styles and different and highly praiseworthy traditions, I desire, in accordance with the request advanced by the Synod Fathers, that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed as the chant proper to the Roman liturgy.

## The sign of peace

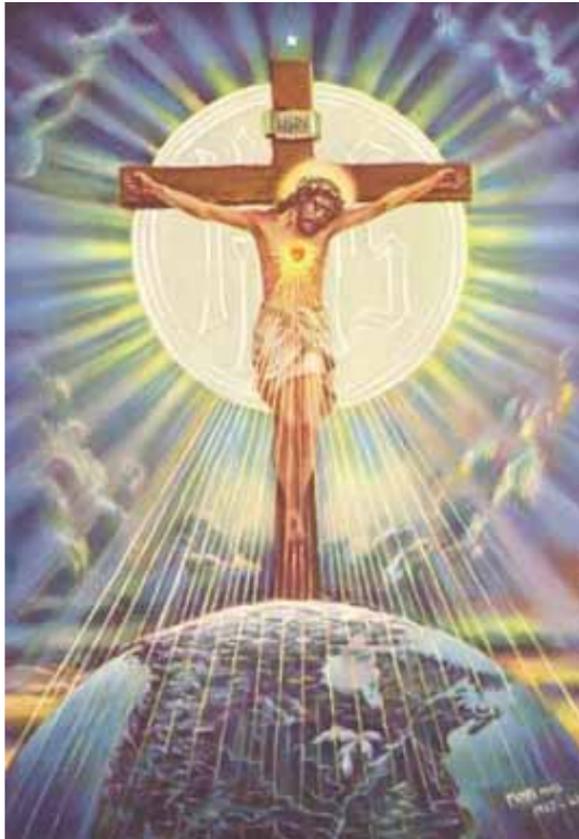
During the Synod of Bishops there was discussion about the appropriateness of greater restraint in this gesture, which can be exaggerated and cause a certain distraction in the assembly just before the reception of Communion. It should be kept in mind that nothing is lost when the sign of peace is marked by a sobriety which preserves the proper spirit of the celebration, as, for example, when it is restricted to one's immediate neighbours.



## The distribution and reception of the Eucharist

I would like to call attention to a pastoral problem frequently encountered nowadays. I am referring to the fact that on certain occasions – for example, wedding Masses, funerals and the like – in addition to practicing Catholics, there may be others present who have long since ceased to attend Mass or are living in a situation which does not permit them to receive the sacraments.

At other times, members of other Christian confessions and even other religions may be present. Similar situations can occur in churches that are frequently visited, especially in tourist areas. In these cases, there is a need to find a brief and clear way to remind those present of the meaning of sacramental communion and the conditions required for its reception.



## Personal conditions for an “active participation”

In their consideration of the *actuosa participatio* of the faithful in the liturgy, the Synod Fathers also discussed the personal conditions required for fruitful participation on the part of individuals. One of these is certainly the spirit of constant conversion which must mark the lives of all the faithful. Active participation in the eucharistic liturgy can hardly be expected if one approaches it superficially, without an examination of his or her life.

This inner disposition can be fostered, for example, by recollection and silence for at least a few moments before the beginning of the liturgy, by fasting and, when necessary, by sacramental confession. A heart reconciled to God makes genuine participation possible. The faithful need to be reminded that there can be no *actuosa participatio* in the sacred mysteries without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring Christ's love into the life of society.

## Spiritual communion

Clearly, full participation in the Eucharist takes place when the faithful approach the altar in person to receive communion. Yet true as this is, care must be taken lest they conclude that the mere fact of their being present in church during the liturgy gives them a right or even an obligation to approach the table of the Eucharist. Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental com-

munion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion, praised by Pope John Paul II and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life.

## Participation through the communications media

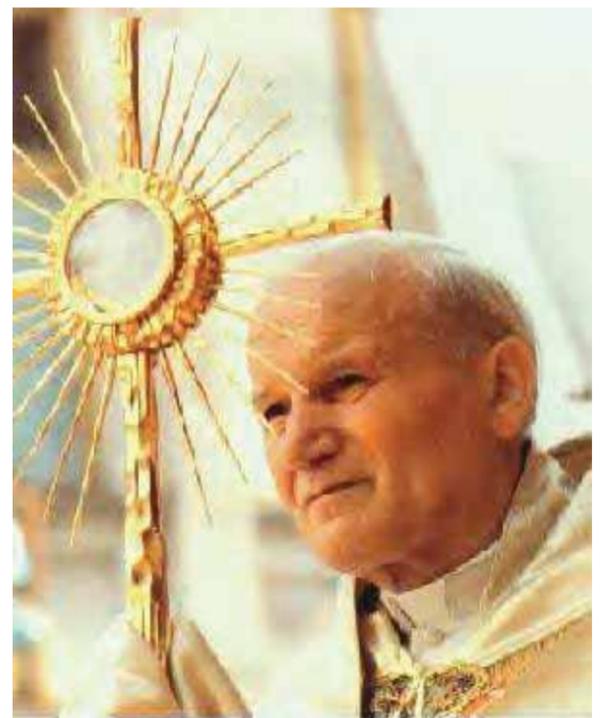
Finally, with regard to the value of taking part in Mass via the communications media, those who hear or view these broadcasts should be aware that, under normal circumstances, they do not fulfil the obligation of attending Mass. Visual images can represent reality, but they do not actually reproduce it. While it is most praiseworthy that the elderly and the sick participate in Sunday Mass through radio and television, the same cannot be said of those who think that such broadcasts dispense them from going to church and sharing in the eucharistic assembly in the living Church.

## The Latin language

In order to express more clearly the unity and universality of the Church, I wish to endorse the proposal made by the Synod of Bishops, in harmony with the directives of the Second Vatican Council, that, with the exception of the readings, the homily and the prayer of the faithful, such liturgies could be celebrated in Latin. Similarly, the better-known prayers of the Church's tradition should be recited in Latin and, if possible, selections of Gregorian chant should be sung.

Speaking more generally, I ask that future priests, from their time in the seminary, receive the preparation needed to understand and to celebrate Mass in Latin, and also to use Latin texts and execute Gregorian chant; nor should we forget that the faithful can be taught to recite the more common prayers in Latin, and also to sing parts of the liturgy to Gregorian chant.

## Adoration and Eucharistic devotion



One of the most moving moments of the Synod came when we gathered in Saint Peter's Basilica, together with a great number of the faithful, for eucharistic adoration. In this act of prayer, and not just in words, the assembly of Bishops wanted to point out the intrinsic relationship between eucharistic celebration and eucharistic adoration. A growing appreciation of this significant aspect of the Church's faith has been an important part of our experience in the years following the liturgical renewal

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desired by the Second Vatican Council. During the early phases of the reform, the inherent relationship between Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not always perceived with sufficient clarity.

For example, an objection that was widespread at the time argued that the eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. In the light of the Church's experience of prayer, however, this was seen to be a false dichotomy. As Saint Augustine put it: "No one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it."

In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself.

## The practice of eucharistic adoration



With the Synod Assembly, therefore, I heartily recommend to the Church's pastors and to the People of God the practice of eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community. Great benefit would ensue from a suitable catechesis explaining the importance of this act of worship, which enables the faithful to experience the liturgical celebration more fully and more fruitfully.

Wherever possible, it would be appropriate, especially in densely populated areas, to set aside specific churches or oratories for perpetual adoration. I also recommend that, in their catechetical training, and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist.

Here I would like to express appreciation and support for all those Institutes of Consecrated Life whose members dedicate a significant amount of time to eucharistic adoration. In this way they give us an example of lives shaped by the Lord's real presence. I would also like to encourage those associations of the faithful and confraternities specifically de-



voted to eucharistic adoration; they serve as a haven of contemplation for the whole Church and a summons to individuals and communities to place Christ at the centre of their lives.

## Forms of eucharistic devotion

The personal relationship which the individual believer establishes with Jesus present in the Eucharist constantly points beyond itself to the whole communion of the Church and nourishes a fuller sense of membership in the Body of Christ. For this reason, besides encouraging individual believers to make time for personal prayer before the Sacrament of the Altar, I feel obliged to urge parishes and other church groups to set aside times for collective adoration. Naturally, already existing forms of eucharistic piety retain their full value. I am thinking, for example, of processions with the Blessed Sacrament, especially the traditional procession on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the Forty Hours devotion, local, national and international Eucharistic Congresses, and other similar initiatives. If suitably updated and adapted to local circumstances, these forms of devotion are still worthy of being practiced today.

## The location of the tabernacle

In considering the importance of eucharistic reservation and adoration, and reverence for the sacrament of Christ's sacrifice, the Synod of Bishops also discussed the question of the proper placement of the tabernacle in our churches. The correct positioning of the tabernacle contributes to the recognition of Christ's real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Therefore, the place where the eucharistic species are reserved, marked by a sanctuary lamp, should be readily visible to everyone entering the church.

It is therefore necessary to take into account the building's architecture: in churches which do not have a Blessed Sacrament chapel, and where the high altar with its tabernacle is still in place, it is appropriate to continue to use this structure for the reservation and adoration of the Eucharist, taking care not to place the celebrant's chair in front of it. In new churches, it is good to position the Blessed Sacrament chapel close to the sanctuary; where this is not possible, it is preferable to locate the tabernacle in the sanctuary, in a sufficiently elevated place, at the centre

of the apse area, or in another place where it will be equally conspicuous. Attention to these considerations will lend dignity to the tabernacle, which must always be cared for, also from an artistic standpoint.

## The Eucharist, a mystery to be lived

The Lord Jesus, who became for us the food of truth and love, speaks of the gift of his life and assures us that "if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever" (Jn 6:51). This "eternal life" begins in us even now, thanks to the transformation effected in us by the gift of the Eucharist: "He who eats me will live because of me" (Jn 6:57). These words of Jesus make us realize how the mystery "believed" and "celebrated" contains an innate power making it the principle of new life within us and the form of our Christian existence.

Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the intrinsically eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape. The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. Rom 8:29ff.). (...) Here we can see the full human import of the radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist: the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence.

## Living the Sunday obligation

Conscious of this new vital principle which the Eucharist imparts to the Christian, the Synod Fathers reaffirmed the importance of the Sunday obligation for all the faithful, viewing it as a wellspring of authentic freedom enabling them to live each day in accordance with what they celebrated on "the Lord's Day." The life of faith is endangered when we lose the desire to share in the celebration of the Eucharist and its commemoration of the paschal victory. Participating in the Sunday liturgical assembly with all our brothers and sisters, with whom we form one body in Jesus Christ, is demanded by our Christian conscience and at the same time it forms that

conscience. To lose a sense of Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day to be sanctified, is symptomatic of the loss of an authentic sense of Christian freedom, the freedom of the children of God.

### The Eucharist, bread broken for the life of the world

Each celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the gift that the crucified Lord made of his life, for us and for the whole world. In the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God's compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbour, which "consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, affecting even my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ." (Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*.)

In all those I meet, I recognize brothers or sisters for whom the Lord gave his life, loving them "to the end" (*Jn* 13:1). Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become "bread that is broken" for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world. Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, we need to realize that Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally engaged: "You yourselves, give them something to eat" (*Mt* 14:16). Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.

### The food of truth and human need

We cannot remain passive before certain processes of globalization which not infrequently increase the gap between the rich and the poor worldwide. We must denounce those who squander the earth's riches, provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven (cf. *Jas* 5:4). For example, it is impossible to remain silent before the "distressing images of huge camps throughout the world of displaced persons and refugees, who are living in makeshift conditions in order to escape a worse fate, yet are still in dire need. Are these human beings not our brothers and sisters? Do their children not come into the world with the same legitimate expectations of happiness as other children?"

**The food of truth demands that we denounce inhumane situations in which people starve to death because of injustice and exploitation, and it gives us renewed strength and courage to work tirelessly in the service of the civilization of love.**

### The Church's social teaching

The mystery of the Eucharist inspires and impels us to work courageously within our world to bring about that renewal of relationships which has its inexhaustible source in God's gift. The prayer which we repeat at every Mass: "Give us this day our daily bread," obliges us to do everything possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions, to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in developing countries.

In a particular way, the Christian laity,



**formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through practical education in charity and justice. To this end, the Synod considered it necessary for Dioceses and Christian communities to teach and promote the Church's social doctrine.**

In this precious legacy handed down from the earliest ecclesial tradition, we find elements of great wisdom that guide Christians in their involvement in today's burning social issues. This teaching, the fruit of the Church's whole history, is distinguished by realism and moderation; it can help to avoid misguided compromises or false utopias.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Eucharist is at the root of every form of holiness, and each of us is called to the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. How many saints have advanced along the way of perfection thanks to their eucharistic devotion! From Saint Ignatius of Antioch to Saint Augustine, from Saint Anthony Abbot to Saint Benedict, from Saint Francis of Assisi to Saint Thomas Aquinas, from Saint Clare of Assisi to Saint Catherine of Siena, from Saint Paschal Baylon to Saint Peter Julian Eymard, from Saint Alphonsus Liguori to Blessed Charles de Foucauld, from Saint John Mary Vianney to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, from Saint Pius of Pietrelcina to Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, from Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati to Blessed Ivan Mertz, to name only a few, holiness has always found its centre in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

This most holy mystery thus needs to be firmly believed, devoutly celebrated and intensely lived in the Church. Jesus' gift of himself in the sacrament which is the memorial of his passion tells us that the success of our lives is found in our participation in the trinitarian life offered to us truly and definitively in him. The celebration and worship of the Eucharist enable us to draw near to God's love and to persevere in that love until we are united with the Lord whom we love.

The offering of our lives, our fellowship with the whole community of believers and our solidarity with all men and women are essential aspects of that *logiké latreía*, spiritual worship, holy and pleasing to God (cf. *Rom* 12:1), which transforms every aspect of our human existence, to the glory of God.

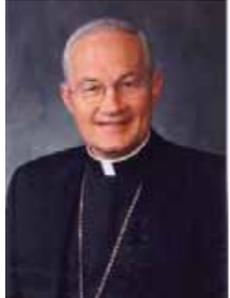
*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 22 February, the Feast of the Chair of Peter, in the year 2007, the second of my Pontificate.*

**BENEDICTUS PP. XVI**





**49<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL  
EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS  
QUEBEC CITY 2008**



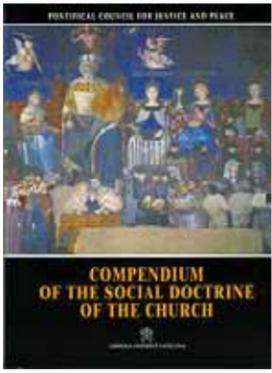
The next International Eucharistic Congress will be held in Quebec City, Canada, from June 15th to June 22nd, 2008, with the theme: "The Eucharist, gift of God for the life of the world".

On October 17, 2004, on the opening day of the Year of the Eucharist, Pope John Paul II confided the mission of organizing this great international gathering to the Archdiocese of Quebec City, headed by Marc Cardinal Ouellet (picture). It will be an occasion for Catholics of the whole world to celebrate their faith in the Eucharist and to give witness to the Gospel by living moments of prayer, reflection and fraternity.

This Congress will be celebrated during the year that marks the 400th anniversary of the foundation of the city of Quebec as one of the first permanent French settlements in America and the seat of the first Catholic diocese north of Mexico.

For more information, go to: [www.cei2008.ca/](http://www.cei2008.ca/)

# The social doctrine of the Catholic Church



On October 25, 2004, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace published the long-awaited "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" which presents, in a systematic manner, the principles of the Church's social doctrine, and summarizes the Popes' main social encyclicals. If the

Church intervenes in social matters, and has developed a set of principles that came to be called the "social doctrine of the Church", it is essentially because, as Pope Benedict XV said, "It is on the economic field that the salvation of souls is at stake."

His immediate successor, Pope Pius XI, also wrote: "It may be said with all truth that nowadays the conditions of social and economic life are such that vast multitudes of men can only with great difficulty pay attention to that one thing necessary, namely their eternal salvation." (Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, May 15, 1931.)

The Church cannot remain indifferent to situations like hunger in the world and indebtedness, which jeopardize the salvation of souls, and this is why she calls for a reform of the financial and economic systems, to put them at the service of the human person. The Church therefore presents the moral principles on which any financial or economic system must be judged.

And so that these principles may be applied in a practical way, the Church calls on the lay faithful — whose proper role, according to the Second Vatican Council, is precisely to renew the temporal order and bring it into line with God's plan — to work in search for concrete solutions and the establishment of an economic system that conforms to the teachings of the Gospel and to the principles of the Church's social doctrine. (*Such a solution is presented in detail in every issue of the "Michael" Journal.*)

## The four pillars of the social doctrine

The social doctrine of the Church can be summarized in four principles, or four "pillars", upon which every system in society must be founded.



1. The dignity of the human person;
2. The common good;
3. Subsidiarity;
4. Solidarity.

The dignity and primacy of the human person, which means that systems are made for men, and not men for systems. In his first Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (The Redeemer of Man, March 4, 1979), Pope John Paul II spoke of "the indispensable transformations of the structures of economic life of poverty amidst plenty that brings into question the financial and monetary mechanisms... (n. 15). Man cannot relinquish himself or the place in the visible world that belongs to him; he cannot become the slave of things, the slave of economic systems, the slave of production, the slave of his own products." (n. 16)

Therefore, the aim of the economic and financial systems is also, according to the Church, the service of man. The aim of the economic system is the satisfaction of human needs: this is what Pope Pius XI stated in his Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (n. 75):

"For then only will the economic and social organism be soundly established and attain its

end, when it secures for all and each those goods which the wealth and resources of nature, technical achievement, and the social organization of economic affairs can give. These goods must be sufficient to supply all needs and an honest livelihood, and to uplift men to that higher level of prosperity and culture which, provided it be used with prudence, is not only no hindrance but is of singular help to virtue."

## Capitalism must be corrected

The social doctrine of the Church stands above existing economic systems, since it confines itself to the level of principles. An economic system is good or not to the extent it applies these principles of justice taught by the Church. For example, Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, in 1987: "The tension between East and West is an opposition... between two concepts of the development of individuals and peoples, both concepts being imperfect and in need of radical correction... This is one of the reasons why the Church's social doctrine adopts a critical attitude towards both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism."

We may understand why the Church condemns Communism, or Marxist collectivism, which, as Pope Pius XI wrote, is "inherently evil" and anti-Christian, since its avowed goal is the complete destruction of private property, the family and religion. But why would the Church condemn capitalism? Would capitalism and Communism be two of a kind?

The fault that the Church finds with present capitalism is neither private property nor free enterprise. On the contrary, far from wishing the disappearance of private property, the Church rather wishes its most widespread availability to all, so that all may become real owners of a capital, and be real "capitalists":

"The dignity of the human person necessarily requires the right of using external goods in order to live according to the right norm of nature. And to this right corresponds a most serious obligation, which requires that, so far as possible, there be given to all an opportunity of possessing private property... Therefore, it is necessary to modify economic and social life so that the way is made easier for widespread private possession of such things as durable goods, homes, gardens, tools requisite for artisan enterprises and family-type farms, investments in enterprises of medium or large size." (John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, May 15, 1961, nn. 114-115.)

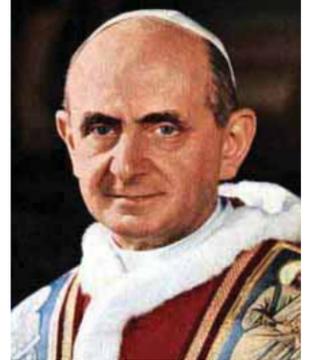
The faults that the Church finds in the capitalist system do not come from the nature of that system (private property, free enterprise), but from the financial system it uses, a financial system that dominates rather than serves, a system that vitiates capitalism. Pope Pius XI wrote in *Quadragesimo Anno*, in 1931: "Capitalism itself is not to be condemned. And surely it is not vicious of its very nature, but it has been vitiated."

What the Church condemns is not capitalism as a producing system, but, according to the words of Pope Paul VI, "the calamitous system that accompanies it," the financial system:



Pius XI

"This unchecked liberalism led to dictatorship rightly denounced by Pope Pius XI as producing 'the international imperialism of money'. One cannot condemn such abuses too strongly, because — let us again recall solemnly — the economy should be at the service of man. But if it is true that a type of capitalism has been the source of excessive suffering, injustices and fratricidal conflicts whose effects still persist, it would be wrong to attribute to industrialization itself evils that belong to the calamitous system that accompanied it. On the contrary, one must recognize in all justice the irreplaceable contribution made by the organization and the growth of industry to the task of development." (Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, on the development of peoples, March 26, 1967, n. 26.)



Paul VI

Money should be a servant, an instrument of service, but the bankers, in appropriating the control over its creation, have made it an instrument of domination: since people cannot live without money, everyone — governments, corporations, individuals — must submit to the conditions imposed upon them by the bankers to obtain money, which is the right to live in today's society. This establishes a real dictatorship over economic life, as the bankers have become the masters of our lives. As Pope Pius XI rightly put it in *Quadragesimo Anno* (n. 106):

"This power becomes particularly irresistible when exercised by those who, because they hold and control money, are able also to govern credit and determine its allotment, for that reason supplying, so to speak, the lifeblood to the entire economic body, and grasping, as it were, in their hands the very soul of production, so that no one dare breathe against their will."

This creation of money as a debt by the bankers is the means of imposing their will upon individuals, and of controlling the world: "Among the actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God, the good of neighbour and the 'structures' created by them, two are very typical: on the one hand, the all-consuming desire for profit, and on the other, the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others." (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 37.)

Since money is an instrument that is basically social, a just system would require money to be issued by society, and not by private bankers for their own profit: "There are certain categories of goods for which one can maintain with reason that they must be reserved to the community when they come to confer such an economic power that it cannot, without danger to the common good, be left to the care of private individuals." (Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*.)

## The common good

According to its primary and broadly accepted sense, the common good indicates "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26.)

Among the numerous implications of the common good, immediate significance is taken on by the principle of the universal destination of goods: "God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 69.)

For everyone to be a real "capitalist" and to have access to earthly goods would be possible with a social income or "dividend" given to every citizen, as a birthright, based on the inheritance of natural resources, and the inventions from past

(continued from page 6)

generations. Pope John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical letter *Laborem Exercens* on Human Work (n. 13): "Through his work man enters into two inheritances: the inheritance of what is given to the whole of humanity in the resources of nature, and the inheritance of what others have already developed on the basis of those resources, primarily by developing technology, that is to say, by producing a whole collection of increasingly perfect instruments for work. In working, man also "enters into the labor of others".

### Poverty amidst plenty

God put on earth all that is needed to feed everyone. But because of the lack of money, goods cannot meet the hungry; mountains of goods pile up in front of millions of starving people. It is the paradox of poverty amidst plenty: "It is a cruel paradox that many of you who could be engaged in the production of food are in financial distress here, while at the same time hunger, chronic malnutrition and the threat of starvation afflict millions of people elsewhere in the world." (John Paul II to the fishermen of St. John's, Newfoundland, Sept. 12, 1984.)

"No more hunger, hunger never again! Ladies and gentlemen, this objective can be achieved. The threat of starvation and the weight of malnutrition are not an inescapable fate. Nature is not, in this crisis, unfaithful to man. According to a generally accepted opinion, while 50% of cultivable land is not yet developed, a great scandal catches the eye from the huge amount of surplus food that certain countries periodically destroy for lack of a sound economy which could have ensured a useful consumption of this food." (Paul VI at the World Conference of Food, Rome, Nov. 9, 1974.)

"So widespread is this phenomenon (poverty amidst plenty) that it brings into question the financial, monetary, production and commercial mechanisms that, resting on various political pressures, support the world economy. These are proving incapable either of remedying the unjust social conditions inherited from the past or of dealing with the urgent challenges and ethical demands of the present... We have before us here a great drama that can leave nobody indifferent." (John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 16.)

### The principle of subsidiarity

This leads to one of the most interesting principles of the social doctrine of the Church, subsidiarity: higher levels of government must not do what families and lesser associations, closer to the individual, can do. This is the opposite of centralization (and of world government): Governments exist to help families and lesser organizations, and not to destroy or absorb them.

Pope Pius XI defined as follows the principle of subsidiarity in his Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: "Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice, and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order, to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the social body, and never destroy and absorb them."

As Louis Even, the founder of the "Michael" Journal, wrote: "Because Caesar (the State) does not correct the financial system that only he can correct, Caesar then goes beyond his proper role and accumulates new functions, using them as a pretext for levying new taxes — sometimes ruinous ones — on citizens and families. Caesar thus becomes the tool of a financial dictatorship that he should destroy, and the oppressor of citizens and families that he should protect."

These new functions create a burdensome bureaucracy that harasses people instead of helping them. Pope John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (n. 48):

"In recent years the range of such intervention (of the State) has vastly expanded, to the point of creating a new type of State, the so-called 'Wel-

fare State'... By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending."

The solution, Pope John Paul II explained, is to respect the principle of subsidiarity: "A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good... In fact, it would appear that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbours to those in need."

This same principle of subsidiarity means that families, the first cell of society, come first, before the State, and that governments must not destroy families and the authority of parents. As the Church states, children belong to their parents, and not to the State.



Benedict XVI

In his recent Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (God is love), Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "In God's family, no one ought to go without the necessities of life... The aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person, according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods."

### A salary to housewives

As a matter of fact, in its social doctrine, the Church also stresses the importance of recognizing the work of the mothers in the home, by giving them an income:

"It will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother — without inhibiting her freedom, without psychological or practical discrimination, and without penalizing her as compared with other women — to devote herself to taking care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs, which vary with age. Having to abandon these tasks in order to take up paid work outside the home is wrong from the point of view of the good of society and of the family when it contradicts or hinders these primary goals of the mission of a mother." (John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, n. 19.)

"It is an intolerable abuse, and to be abolished at all cost, for mothers on account of the father's low wage to be forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the home to the neglect of their proper cares and duties, especially the training of children." (Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 71.)

In October, 1983, the Holy See issued the "Charter of the Rights of the Family", in which it called for "the remuneration of the work in the home of one of the parents; it should be such that mothers will not be obliged to work outside the home to the detriment of family life and especially of the education of the children. The work of the mother in the home must be recognized and respected because of its value for the family and for society." (Article 10.)

### The principle of solidarity

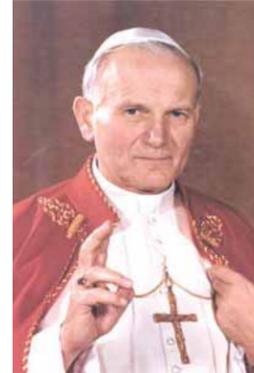
Solidarity is another word for the love of neighbour. As Christians, we must care about the fate of all our brothers and sisters in Christ, for it is on this love of our neighbour that we will be judged at the end of our lives on this earth:

"It is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognize His chosen ones... the poor remain entrusted to us, and it is this responsibility upon which we shall be judged at the end of time (cf. Mt 25:31-46): 'Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from Him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones

who are His brethren.'" (Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church, n. 183)

### The duty of every Christian

It is therefore a duty and obligation for every Christian to work for the establishment of justice and of a better economic system: "Anyone wishing to renounce the difficult yet noble task of improving the lot of man in his totality, and of all people, with the excuse that the struggle is difficult and that constant effort is required, or simply because of the experience of defeat and the need to begin again, that person would be betraying the will of God the Creator." (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 30.)



John Paul II

"Such a task is not an impossible one. The principle of solidarity, in a wide sense, must inspire the effective search for appropriate institutions and mechanisms... This difficult road of the indispensable transformations of the structures of economic life is one on which it will not be easy to go forward without the intervention of a true conversion of mind, will and heart. The task requires resolute commitments by individuals and peoples that are free and linked in solidarity." (John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 16.)

There are, of course, many ways to help our brothers in need: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, visiting the imprisoned and the sick, etc. Some will send donations to charitable organizations, whether to help the poor of our country or of the Third World. But if these donations can relieve a few poor people for a few days or weeks, they nevertheless do not suppress the causes of poverty. What is much better is to correct the problem at its root, to attack the very causes of poverty, and to re-establish every human being in his rights and dignity of a person created in the image of God, and who is entitled to a minimum of earthly goods:

"More than any other, the individual who is animated by true charity labors skillfully to discover the causes of misery, to find the means to combat it, and to overcome it resolutely. A creator of peace, he will follow his path, lighting the lamps of joy and playing their brilliance and loveliness on the hearts of men across the surface of the globe, leading them to recognize, across all frontiers, the faces of their brothers, the faces of their friends." (Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n. 75.)

What is needed is apostles to educate the population on the social doctrine of the Church, and practical solutions to apply it. Pope Paul VI wrote, also in *Populorum Progressio* (n. 86): "All of you who have heard the appeal of suffering peoples, all of you who are working to answer their cries, you are the apostles of a development which is good and genuine, which is not wealth that is self-centered and sought for its own sake, but rather an economy which is put at the service of man, the bread which is daily distributed to all, as a source of brotherhood and a sign of providence."

And in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II wrote (n. 38.): "These attitudes and 'structures of sin' (the thirst for money and power) are only conquered — presupposing the help of divine grace — by a diametrically opposed attitude: a commitment to the good of one's neighbour..."

To sum up, the battle of the "Michael" Journal is the battle for the salvation of souls. The "Michael" Journal only repeats what the Popes and the Church demand: a new evangelization — to remind basic Christian principles to Christians who unfortunately forget them or cease to put them into practice — and a restructuring of the economic system. To be an apostle of the "Michael" Journal is therefore one of the most urgent and necessary vocations for our times. Who, among those who hear or read these words, will have the grace to respond to this call?

# A priest who saw heaven, hell, and purgatory

## The death experience of Father Jose Maniyangat

Fr. Jose Maniyangat is currently the pastor of St. Mary's Mother of Mercy Catholic Church in Macclenny, Florida. Here is his personal testimony (which can be found on the internet at this address: <http://www.stmarymacclenny.com/fatherJstory.htm>):

I was born on July 16, 1949 in Kerala, India to my parents, Joseph and Theresa Maniyangat. I am the eldest of seven children: Jose, Mary, Theresa, Lissama, Zachariah, Valsa and Tom.

At the age of fourteen, I entered St. Mary's Minor Seminary in Thiruvalla to begin my studies for the priesthood. Four years later, I went to St. Joseph's Pontifical Major Seminary in Alwaye, Kerala to continue my priestly formation. After completing the seven years of philosophy and theology, I was ordained a priest on January 1, 1975 to serve as a missionary in the Diocese of Thiruvalla.

On Sunday April 14, 1985, the Feast of the Divine Mercy, I was going to celebrate Mass at a mission church in the north part of Kerala, and I had a fatal accident. I was riding a motorcycle when I was hit head-on by a jeep driven by a man who was intoxicated after a Hindu festival. I was rushed to a hospital about 35 miles away. On the way, my soul came out from my body and I experienced death. Immediately, I met my Guardian Angel. I saw my body and the people who were carrying me to the hospital. I heard them crying and praying for me. At this time my angel told me: "I am going to take you to Heaven, the Lord wants to meet you and talk with you." He also said that, on the way, he wanted to show me hell and purgatory.

### Hell

First, the angel escorted me to hell. It was an awful sight! I saw Satan and the devils, an unquenchable fire of about 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, worms crawling, people screaming and fighting, others being tortured by demons. The angel told me that all these sufferings were due to unrepented mortal sins. Then, I understood that there are seven degrees of suffering or levels according to the number and kinds of mortal sins committed in their earthly lives. The souls looked very ugly, cruel and horrific. It was a fearful experience. I saw people whom I knew, but I am not allowed to reveal their identities. The sins that convicted them were mainly abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, hatefulness, unforgiveness and sacrilege. The angel told me that if they had repented, they would have avoided hell and gone instead to purgatory. I also understood that some people who repent from these sins might be purified on earth through their sufferings. This way they can avoid purgatory and go straight to heaven.

I was surprised when I saw in hell even priests and Bishops, some of whom I never expected to see. Many of them were there because they had misled the people with false teaching and bad example.

### Purgatory

After the visit to hell, my Guardian Angel escorted me to purgatory. Here too, there are seven degrees of suffering and unquenchable fire. But it is far less intense than hell and there was neither quarreling nor fighting. The main suffering of these souls is their separation from God. Some of those who are in purgatory committed numerous mortal sins, but they were reconciled with God before their death. Even though these souls are suffering, they enjoy peace and the knowledge that one day they will see God face to face.

I had a chance to communicate with the souls in purgatory. They asked me to pray for them and to tell the people to pray for them as well, so they can go to heaven quickly. When we pray for these souls, we will receive their gratitude through their prayers, and once they enter heaven, their prayers become even more meritorious.

It is difficult for me to describe how beautiful my Guardian Angel is. He is radiant and bright. He is my constant companion and helps me in all my ministries, especially my healing ministry. I experience his presence everywhere I go and I am grateful for his protection in my daily life.

### Heaven

Next, my angel escorted me to heaven passing through a big dazzling white tunnel. I never experienced this much peace and joy in my life. Then immediately heaven opened up and I heard the most delightful music, which I never heard before. The angels were singing and praising God. I saw all the saints, especially the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, and many dedicated holy Bishops and priests who were shining like stars. And when I appeared before the Lord, Jesus told me: "I want you to go back to the world. In your second life, you will be an instrument of peace and healing to My people. You will walk in a foreign land and you will speak in a foreign tongue. Everything is possible for you with My grace." After these words, the Blessed Mother told me: "Do whatever He tells you. I will help you in your ministries."

Words can not express the beauty of heaven. There we find so much peace and happiness, which exceed a million times our imagination. Our Lord is far more beautiful than any image can convey. His face is radiant and luminous and more beautiful than a thousand rising suns. The pictures we see in the world are only a shadow of His magnificence. The Blessed Mother was next to Jesus; She was so beautiful and radiant. None of the images we see in this world can compare with Her real beauty. Heaven is our real home; we are all created to reach heaven and enjoy God forever. Then, I came back to the world with my angel.

While my body was at the hospital, the doctor completed all examinations and I was pronounced dead. The cause of death was bleeding. My family was notified, and since they were far away, the



hospital staff decided to move my dead body to the morgue. Because the hospital did not have air conditioners, they were concerned that the body would decompose quickly. As they were moving my dead body to the morgue, my soul came back to the body. I felt an excruciating pain because of so many wounds and broken bones. I began to scream, and then the people became frightened and ran away screaming. One of them approached the doctor and said: "The dead body is screaming." The doctor came to examine the body and found that I was alive. So he said: "Father is alive, it is a miracle! Take him back to the hospital."

Now, back at the hospital, they gave me blood transfusions and I was taken to surgery to repair the broken bones. They worked on my lower jaw, ribs, pelvic bone, wrists, and right leg. After two months, I was released from the hospital, but my orthopedic doctor said that I would never walk again. I then said to him: "The Lord who gave me my life back and sent me back to the world will heal me." Once at home, we were all praying for a miracle. Still after a month, and with the casts removed, I was not able to move. But one day while praying I felt an extraordinary pain in my pelvic area. After a short while the pain disappeared completely and I heard a voice saying: "You are healed. Get up and walk." I felt the peace and healing power on my body. I immediately got up and walked. I praised and thanked God for the miracle.

I reached my doctor with the news of my healing, and he was amazed. He said: "Your God is the true God. I must follow your God." The doctor was Hindu, and he asked me to teach him about our Church. After studying the Faith, I baptized him and he became Catholic.

Following the message from my Guardian Angel, I came to the United States on November 10, 1986 as a missionary priest... Since June 1999, I have been pastor of St. Mary's Mother of Mercy Catholic Church in Macclenny, Florida.

*Fr. Jose Maniyangat*

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