At the heart of the Pope’s letter to priests

Not honey but salt of the earth

ANDREA MONDA

Psalm 136’s cry of exultation is the leitmotif accompanying the text that the Pope wished to send to all priests on the occasion of the celebration of their Patron Saint, the Holy Curé of Ars, on the 190th anniversary of his death. In this long letter, signed and sent from the Cathedral of Saint John Lateran, the Bishop of Rome addresses all priests in the world but, in his way, he places himself before each one of them, he speaks informally from the heart, cor ad cor loquitur, according to the motto of the blessed, soon-to-be saint, Cardinal Newman. Francis speaks heart to heart, and wishes to convey his embrace, his esteem, his closeness, his encouragement to each Catholic priest around the world. The letter addresses “you” who, “like the Curé of Ars, ... serve ‘in the trenches’, bearing the burden of the day and the heat (cf. Mt 20:12), confronting an endless variety of situations in your effort to care for and accompany God’s people. I want to say a word to each of you who, often without fanfare and at personal cost, amid weariness, infirmity and sorrow, carry out your mission of service to God and to your people”.

This “effort” takes courage and needs to be replenished, reinvigorated; this is the sense that immediately comes from reading this important text by the current Successor of Peter. Encouragement and gratitude: “As an older brother and a father, I too would like in this letter to thank you in the name of the holy and faithful People of God for all that you do for them”. An older brother and father: among the many documents of Francis’ pontificate, this is one of those most imbued with the Holy Father’s paternity.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

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Lucas Cranach the Elder, “Christ as a Good Shepherd”

No issue on 16 August

We would like to inform our readers that the next issue of the English edition will be published on Friday, 23 August.
VATICAN
BULLETIN

CHANGES IN EPISCOPATE

The Holy Father accepted the resign- tion of Bishop Gaetano Gallusara [Fumagalli], SIS, titular Bishop of Mura, Vicar Apostolic of Pu- callpa, Peru (31 July).

The Holy Father appointed Fr Augusto Martin Quijano Rodriguez, SIS, as Vicar Apostolic of the Apostolic Vicariate of Pucallpa. Until now he has served as counsellor Inspector (31 July).

Bishop-elect Quijano Rodriguez, 59, was born in Alja, Peru. He was ordained a priest on 21 November 1997. He has served in parish ministry as: counsellor to the San Juan Bosco Community and then vicar; manager and then director of the Queretaro Honda Community; delegate Inspector for Missions; provincial Inspector for missionary animation, director and treasurer of the Monte Salvadore Community; director of the San Lorenzo Community.

The Holy Father accepted the resigna- tion of Bishop Josip Mrzljak of Varazdin, Croatia (1 Aug).

The Holy Father appointed Bishop of Varazdin Fr Canon Boze Radoi from the clergy of the Arch- diocese of Đakovo-Osijek. Until now he has served as rector of the Pontifical Croatian Canonize of Saint Jerome in Rome (1 Aug).

Bishop-elect Radoi, 54, was born in Crvenice, Bosnia and Herzegovi- na. He was ordained a priest on 29 June 1990. He holds a licence in spiritual theology. He has served in parish ministry and as: spiritual director at the Major Seminary of Đakovo; assistant for the ongoing formation of young priests; lecturer at the Đakovo Faculty of Theology; member of the presbytery council. In 2010 he was appointed canon of the Cathedral Chapter of Saint Peter in Đakovo.

The Holy Father accepted the resigna- tion of Archbishop Georges Pon- tier of Marseille, France (8 Aug).

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Jean-Marc Aveline as Metropolitan Archbishop of Marseille. Until now he has served as titular Bishop of Simidica and Auxiliary of Marseille (8 Aug).

Archbishop Aveline, 60, was born in Sidi Bel Abbés, Algeria. He was ordained a priest on 3 November 1984. He was ordained a bishop on 26 January 2014, subsequent to his appointment as titular Bishop of Simidica and Auxiliary of Mar- seille.

CONGREGATION FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES

On 6 August, the Holy Father ap- pointed as members of the Congreg- ation for the Oriental Churches the following: Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, Archbishop of Perugia-Città della Pieve; Cardinal Carlos Osoro Sierra, Archbishop of Madrid; Card- inal Anders Arborelius, OCD, Bish- op of Stockholm; Cardinal Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer, SJ, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; Archbishop An- thony Colin Fisher, OSB, of Sydney; Archbishop Georges Bacouni of Beirut and Jbeil for Greek Melkites; Archbishop Borys Gubazak of Phil- adelphia for Ukrainians; Archbishop Michel Aupetit of Paris; and Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCC, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

RELATIONS WITH STATES

The Holy Father appointed Arch- bishop Petar Rajčić, titular Archbish- op of Sarsentorum, as Apostolic Nuncio in Estonia and Latvia. Until now he has served as Apostolic Nuncio in Lithuania (6 Aug).

START OF MISSION

On 6 December 2018, Archbishop Charles Daniel Balvo, began his mission as Apostolic Nuncio in the Czech Republic with the presenta- tion of his Letters of Credence to H.E. Mr Miloš Zeman, President of the Czech Republic.

NECROLOGY

Bishop Stuart France O’Connell, SM, Bishop emeritus of Ratortonga, Cook Islands, at age 84 (6 Aug)

Bishop John Philip Sakkil of Timika, Indonesia, Apostolic Administrator of Merauke, Indonesia, at age 59 (3 Aug)

Archbishop Jesu B. Tuquib, Archbishop emeritus of Cagayan de Oro, the Philippines, at age 85 (6 Aug)

Families: schools of true human development

Holy Father’s prayer intention for August

“Let us pray that families, through their life of prayer and love, become ever more clearly ‘schools of true hu- man development’. This is the prayer intention for the month of August that Pope Francis has entrusted to the Worldwide Prayer Network. The video message can be viewed at www.thepopevideo.org. ”

“What kind of world do we want to leave for the fu- ture?”, he asks, as images of a family at home scroll by. “Let us leave a world with families”, he asks, as images of a family at home scroll by. “Let us leave a world with families”, he asks. And above all, the Pontiff continues, “let us care for our fami- lies, because they are true schools for the future, spaces of freedom, and centers of humanity”. He then asks us to “reserve a special place in our families for individual and communal prayer”.

This proposal is accompanied by images suggesting a lack of communication within a nuclear family: a father in a room focused on fixing something; a mother in an- other room watching television. Only the daughter calls to both in order to reestablish the bonds, gathering ev- eryone around the table where they join one another in prayer. This is the mission of families, as “schools of hu- man development”.

The video, translated into nine languages, was pro- duced and distributed by La Machi agency, in collabora- tion with Vatican Media, which recorded it.
Bridges of friendship and solidarity in place of barriers

The profile of a Church that looks at those excluded and rejected from society

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

In the Acts of the Apostles, preaching the Gospel does not rely simply on words, but also on the concrete actions that bear witness to the truth of the Good News. It is a case of “wonders and signs” (Acts 2:43) performed by the Apostles, confirming their word and demonstrating that they act in the name of Christ. Thus the Apostles interceded for a miracle which is the first account of healing, being “by the hand in order to raise — not to condemn”. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s catechesis, which he gave in Italian.

The way of Jesus, which leads to peace, passes through forgiveness, for one evil never corrects another evil and no resentment is ever good for the heart.  

(@Pontifex)

— the Beautiful door — they see a beggar, a man paralyzed from birth. Why was that man at the door? Because the law of Moses (cf. Lv 21:18) forbade the offering of sacrifices by people with physical disabilities, which were believed to be the consequence of some sin. Let us remember that, faced with a man who was blind from birth, the people had asked Jesus: “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (Jn 9:2). According to that mindset, there was always a sin at the root of a deformity. And later, they were even denied access to the Temple. The lame man, the paradigm of society’s many excluded and rejected, is there begging for alms, as he does every day. He cannot enter but he is at the door, when something unexpected happens: Peter and John arrive and an exchange of glances is sparked. The lame man looks at the two to beg for alms. The Apostles instead fix their gaze on him, inviting him to look at them in a different way, to receive a different gift. The lame man looks at them and Peter says to him: “I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (cf. Acts 3:6). The Apostles have established a relationship because this is the way that God loves to manifest himself, in relationships, always in dialogue, always in the apparitions, always with the heart’s inspiration: they are God’s relationships with us; through a true interpersonal encounter which can happen through love.

In addition to being the religious centre, the Temple was also a place for economic and financial exchange. The prophets and Jesus himself had often lashed out against this abomination (cf. Lk 19:44-46). How often I think of this when I see parishes that think money is more important than the Sacraments! Please! A poor Church: Let us ask the Lord for this. In meeting the Apostles, that beggar does not find money but he finds the Name that saves man: Jesus Christ, the Nazarene. Peter invokes Jesus’ name, he commands the paralyzed man to stand upright like the living; standing, and he touches this ill person, that is, he takes him by the hand and raises him up, a gesture in which Saint John Chrysostom sees “an image of Resurrection” (Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, 8). And here appears a portrait of the Church that sees those in difficulty, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that does not close her eyes, that knows how to look humanity in the face, that...
Dear Friends,

Good morning and welcome!

I thank Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco for his words and I also thank all of you for being here, and for undertaking a long walk to get here! You have come a long way. Surely you are a little tired. I am certain of one thing: that inside you feel freer than before. I am certain of this. And what does this tell us? That freedom is achieved on the move; it is not bought at the supermarket. It is achieved on the move. Freedom is not achieved by staying locked in a room with a cell phone, nor by overdoing it in order to escape reality somewhat. No, freedom is achieved on the move, step by step, together with others, never alone!

You had five stops on your route, five encounters with great saints who travelled through Europe in different eras: Paul of Tarasus, Benedict of Nursia, Cyril and Methodius, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena. These people, these saints, what did they have in common? They did not wait for something from life or from others, but trusted in God and took risks; they got involved, on the move in order to achieve dreams so great that centuries they have done good for us too, for you, for everyone. They gave their time, they did not keep it for themselves. So, after these five encounters, I would like to leave you five words. You had five encounters, I would like to leave you five words. They are not my own, but are from the Gospel which accompanied you on your journey and which I invite you to keep with you always, as your naviga—tor — the Gospel is the true naviga—tor for the journey of life — and to open it each day, because the Gos—pel is the map for life. Here are Jesus’ five words: they are five words, easy to remember: “Give, and it will be given to you.” (Lk 6:38). Five words, but one entire message, a plan for life. Simple words, which outline a clear route. Give, and it will be given to you.

First and foremost, give. Today one thinks immediately of having. Many live with the sole purpose of possessing what they like. But they are never satisfied, because when you have one thing you want another, and then yet another, and so on, without end. Having has no fill. Having more causes more hunger, more desire to have, without finding what does the heart good. 

The heart works out not by having, but by giving. Having fattens the heart, makes it heavy, makes it worldly. Giving makes it light. It is a daily workout. For this reason Jesus sets as the point of de—parture not having, but giving: Give, that is, start getting into the game of life! To give means to stand up from the sofa, from the comfort that make one withdraw into oneself, and get on the move. To give means to stop enduring life and go down into the field in order to give the world the gift of good. Please, do not leave life on the night stand, do not be content to watch it pass by on television; do not believe that the next app you download will make you happy. “Our best dreams are only attained through hope, patience and commitment, and not in haste” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus Vivit, 143). God accompa—nies you on this journey and cheers you on, so you can give your best. There is also another thing in the desire to have: alienation. You lose your originality and will become a photocopy. But God created each person original, with your own name. Let us not make of our ori—ginality — as that 16-year-old youth Carlo Acutis said — a photocopy.

How many young people today — it is sad — are a photocopy; they have lost their ori—ginality and copy the identity of any other originality. You say: “Okay, I’ll give my best, but there is a lot of in—difference going around, so many think only of themselves. Won’t I look naive and lose out, and by giving become the kind of fool that everyone laughs at?” I would like to tell you: trust in Jesus. Trust in Jesus. After saying give, he adds: it will be given to you. God is Father and he will give you more than you imagine. God does not leave hands empty. When it seems he is taking something from you, it is only to make room and give you more and better, to help you ad—vance on the journey. He frees you from the false promises of consumerism in order to make you free with—in. Jesus makes you happy within, not on the outside. Jesus does not give you make-up, no he makes in—ner reality; he makes you beautiful from within. He makes you beauti—ful from within! Not from the out—side. He gives you what nothing can give you; because the latest smart—phone, the fastest car or stylish dress, beyond never being enough, will never give you the joy of feeling loved and also the joy of loving. This is true joy: feeling loved and loving.

Thus, the first thing, give. It is the secret of life. Do you know why? Because life is a spiritual reality: “I want to own life, to own my life. How do I do it?” Life is owned only by giving it by giving it. This way you will own your life! But you could say: “Even if I give my best, reality doesn’t change for the bet—ter.” It is not true. Do you know why? Because you are unique. Be—cause no one in the world can give the world what you are called to give! Someone said the same thing to Mother Teresa of Calcutta: “But sister, you do these things with the poor, with the dying... You do so many beautiful things... But what use is this in a world so pagan, so atheist, so evil, so war-torn?” And she said: “One more drop in the ocean. If I don’t give it no one will”. No one can give what I, alone, can give. No one can give the world what you are called to give! Each one of you is unique and — please never forget it — you are precious in the eyes of God. You are precious to the Church, you are precious to me. I would like to say to each one of you: you are precious to me. You are precious to God. It would be beau—tiful for you to say it from the heart each time you are together, to each one, from the heart: “You are pre—cious; you are precious...” This is the gift!

Jesus’ invitation, Give, and it will be given to you, also applies in regard to others. I like to think about what

No one can give the world what you are called to give! Each one of you is unique and ... precious in the eyes of God. You are precious to the Church; you are precious to me... This is the gift...
US Bishops’ appeal after mass shootings

Protect innocent victims

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Beautiful! Did you notice that creation has no boundaries? Creation has no boundaries: it is of everyone and for everyone. Plants, forests, animals grow without borders, without customs. Creation is an open book that offers a valuable lesson: we are in the world to encounter others, to create communion, because we are all connected.

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Young people on the move

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

There is Jesus who says, “Look at me: I am here!” Let us take Jesus’ hand and allow ourselves to be raised up.

Peter and John teach us not to put our trust in the means, that they are useful, but rather in the true richness which is our relationship with the Risen One. Indeed we are – as Saint Paul would say – “poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2 Cor 6:10). Our all is the Gospel which manifests the power of the name of Jesus, who performs miracles.

And we – each of us – what do we possess? What is our wealth, what is our treasure? With what can we make others rich? Let us ask the Father for the gift of a memory that is grateful in recollecting the benefits of his love in our life, to give everyone the witness of praise and gratitude. Let us not forget: a hand always outstretched to help the other to stand up; it is the hand of Jesus who, through our hand, helps others to stand.

Wednesday’s General Audience

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from Malta, China, Japan and the United States of America. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord. May God bless you!

I offer a special greeting to young people, the elderly, the sick and the newlywed. The day after tomorrow we will celebrate the Feast of Saint Teresa Benedict of the Cross (Edith Stein), Virgin and martyr, co-patroness of Europe. I invite you all to look to her courageous choices, expressed in an authentic conversion to Christ and in offering her life against any form of intolerance and ideological perversion.

After the General Audience on Wednesday, 7 August, the Holy Father blessed an image of Our Lady of Knock, which will be used for initiatives aimed at reawakening the faith and sponsored by the Marian Shrine in Ireland. Each year, this Shrine is visited by more than one and a half million pilgrims. One year after Pope Francis’ 2018 Apostolic Journey and two years after the Apparition of the Mother of God to Knock, Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam, where the Shrine is located, hopes especially to engage females in the initiative.

Candlelight vigil honouring victims of mass shooting in El Paso, 7 August (AFP)
Note of the Apostolic Penitentiary

On the importance of the internal forum and the inviolability of the sacramental seal

"By His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man, through the gestures and words that illuminated his highest and inviolable dignity; in himself, dead and risen, he restored fallen humanity amid the darkness of sin and death, to those who believe in him he opened the relationship with his Father; with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he consecrated the Church, a community of believers, as his true body and participated in his own prophetic, royal and priestly power, so that he would be in the world as the extension of his own presence and mission, announcing to men of all times the truth, guiding them to the splendour of its light, allowing their life to be truly touched and transfigured. In this time of human history so troubled, the increasing technoscientific progress does not seem to correspond to an appropriate ethical and social development, but rather to a worrying disproportion between means and sense of responsibility before God and men; a detachment, which sometimes transforms into the unjustifiable "claim" that the Church herself, in certain matters, should conform her own juridical system to the civil systems of the States in which she is present, as the only possible "guarantee of correctness and rectitude". In consideration of all this, the Apostolic Penitentiary has held it appropriate to intervene, with this Note, to reaffirm the importance of and to promote a better understanding of the concepts, typical of ecclesial and social communication, which today seem to have become more alien to public opinion and sometimes to the same civil juridical systems: the sacramental seal, the confidentiality inherent in the internal extra-sacramental forum, the professional secrecy, the criteria and the limitations proper to all other communication.

1. Sacramental seal

Recently, speaking of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Holy Father Francis wished to reaffirm the indispensability and the inaccessibility of the sacramental seal: "Reconciliation itself is a benefit that the wisdom of the Church has always safeguarded with all her moral and legal might, with the sacramental seal. Although it is not always understood by the modern mentality, it is indispensable for the sanctity of the sacrament and for the freedom of the conscience of the penitent, who must be certain, at any time, that the sacramental conversation will remain within the secrecy of the confessional, between one's own conscience that opens to grace, and God, with the necessary mediation of the priest. The sacramental seal is indispensable and no human power has jurisdiction over it, nor lay any claim to it if..."

The inviolable secrecy of Confession comes directly from the revealed divine right and is not only obtained in the very nature of the Sacrament, but to the point of not admitting any exception in the ecclesiastical sphere, nor, least of all, in the civil and social. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation contained the very essence of Christianity and of the Church: the "martyrdom"... rendered to save us and decided to involve the Church as a "necessary instrument", and in her, those whom he chose, called and constituted as his ministers.

In order to express this truth, the Church has always taught that, in the celebra- tion of the Sacraments, act "in persona Christi capitis", that is, in the very person of Christ the Head: "Christ allows us to use his 'I', we speak in the 'I' of Christ, Christ is 'drawing us into himself' and allows us to be united. He unites us to his 'I'. [...] It is this union with his 'I' which is realized in the words of the consecra- tion. Also in the 'I' of the Sacrament, you because none of us could absolve from sins — it is the 'I' of Christ, of God, who alone can absolve". Even more, if he humbly goes to the priest to confess his sins or her bears witness to the great mystery of the Incarnation and the supernatural essence of the Church and of the ministerial priesthood, through which the Ris- en Christ comes to meet men, sacramentally — that is, really — touches their life and saves them. For this reason, the defence of the sacramental seal by the confessor, if necessary "secreta et seupe efficacemente", both by the act of dutiful 'allegiance' towards the penitent, but much more a necessary testimony — a "martyrdom"... rendered to save us..."

The matter of the seal is currently ex- pressed and regulated by can. 1388, §1 of the CIC, and can. 1382, §1 of the CCEA, as well as n. 1467 of the Catechism of the Cath- olic Church, where "...the Church..." establishes, by virtue of her own authority, rather than that she "declares" — that she recognizes as an irreducible datum, which derives precisely from the sanctity of the sacra- ment instituted by Christ — "that every priest, even when any danger of revelation is ex- cluded" (CIC can. 984, §1). The doctrine also helped to further specify the content of the sacramental seal, which includes "all the sins of both the penitent and others known from the penitent’s confession, both mortal and venial, both ocult and public, as manifested with regard to absolution and therefore known to the confessor by virtue of sacramental know- ledge". The sacramental seal, therefore, con- cerns everything the penitent has admitted, even in the event that the confessor does not grant absolution: if the confession is invalid or for some reason the absolution is not given, the seal must be maintained in any case. The priest, in fact, becomes aware of the sins of the penitent "non ut homo, sed ut Deus — not as man, but as God", to such an extent that he simply "does not know" what he was doing during confession, but during confession, does not hear it as if it were the voice of a man, as if it were the voice of a man, as if it were the voice of a man..."
The internal forum and the inviolability of the sacramental seal

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6.

name of God. The confessor could therefore also "swear", without any prejudice to his conscience, to "not know" what he knows only as a minister of God. Because of its peculiar nature, the sacramental seal manages to bind the confessor also "interiorly", to the point that he is forbidden voluntarily to reveal the confession and he is obliged to suppress any involuntary recollection of it. The secrecy deriving from the seal also binds those who, in any way, are aware of the sins disclosed in confession: "The interpreter, if there is one, and all others who in any way have knowledge of sins from confession are also obliged to observe secrecy" (CIC can. 893, §2).

The absolute prohibition imposed by the sacramental seal is such as to prevent the person speaking from the content of the confession to the penitent himself, outside of the sacrament, without the "explicit (and all the more from speaking of the content of the confession) sacramental seal is such as to prevent the priest and even the confessor, who issued it, the oath connected to the "pontifical secret" has as its ultimate ratio the public good of the Church and the salus animarum. It presupposes that this good is threatened by the sacrament of the salus animarum, thus including the use of information that does not fall under the seal, can and must be correctly interpreted by the Apostolic See alone, in the person of the Roman Pontiff, whom Christ the Lord constituted and placed as the visible principle and foundation of the unity of faith and of the communion of the whole Church.

With regard to the other areas of communication, both public and private, in all its forms and expressions, Church wisdom has always indicated as a fundamental item of the "golden rule" pronounced by the Lord and contained in the Gospel of Luke: "as you would have men do unto you, do unto them" (Lk 6:31). In this way, in the communication of truth as in the silence that pertains to it, when one who seeks it does not have the right to know it, one must always conform one’s life to the precept of fraternal love, keeping before one’s eyes the good and safety of others, respect for private life and the conformation good.

As a particular duty of communicating the truth, dictated by fraternal charity, one cannot fail to mention the "fraternal correction", in its various degrees, taught by the Lord. It remains the horizon of reference, where necessary and according to what the conscience allow and require: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the Church" (Mt 18:15-17).

In a time of the "massification" of communication, in which all information is "frittered away" and with it, unfortunately, also a part of people’s lives, it is necessary to re-learn the power of speech, its constructive power, but also its destructive potential; we must be vigilant so that the sacramental seal is never violated by anyone, and the necessary confidentiality connected to the exercise of the ecclesiastical ministry is always jealously guarded, having as its sole horizon truth and the integral good of persons.

Let us invoke from the Holy Spirit, for the Church, an order of love for the truth, that in every area and circumstance of life, the ability to preserve it in its entirety in the proclamation of the Gospel to every human heart, not only for the sake of martyrdom in order to defend the inviolability of the sacramental seal, as well as the prudence and wisdom necessary to avoid any instrumental and erroneous use of information private to proper, social and ecclesiastical persons.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13.

Giuseppe Molteni, "The Confession"

3. Secrets and other limits inherent to communication

Different in nature from the internal sacramental and extra-sacramental forum, are the confidences shared under the seal as well as the so-called "professional secrets" belonging to certain types of people, both in civil society and in the ecclesiastical sphere as a whole, by virtue of a special office that they carry out for individuals or for the community.

Such secrets, by virtue of the fact that they must always be preserved “save – the Catechism of the Catholic Church states at n. 2491 – in exceptional cases where keeping the secret is bound to cause very great harm to the one who confided it, to the one who received it or to a third party, and where the very grave harm can be avoided only by divulging the truth”.

A special case of secrecy is that of the “pontifical secret”, which is binding by virtue of the oath connected to the exercise of certain offices in the service of the Apostolic See. If the oath of secrecy always binds one who, having taken it, after he has issued it, the oath connected to the “pontifical secret” has as its ultimate ratio the public good of the Church and the salus animarum. It presupposes that this good is threatened by the sacrament of the salus animarum, thus including the use of information that does not fall under the seal, can and must be correctly interpreted by the Apostolic See alone, in the person of the Roman Pontiff, whom Christ the Lord constituted and placed as the visible principle and foundation of the unity of faith and of the communion of the whole Church.

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A letter of encouragement and support

Pope Francis comforts and thanks those who expended themselves in service to God’s people

To my brother priests

Dear Brothers,

A hundred and sixty years have passed since the death of the Holy Curé of Ars, whom Pope Pius IX proposed as the patron of parish priests throughout the world. On this, his feast day, I write this letter not only to parish priests but to all of you, my brother priests, who have quietly walked “all behind” in order to touch others in the daily life of your communities. Like the Curé of Ars, you serve “in the trenches” of pastoral care, carrying out the mission of Jesus and his Church. In these years, we have become more attentive to the scandal of abuse, and days to reach some remote village in order to visit the isolated sheep of their flocks. They are great in number but not uncommon. They are those who daily visit their people, loving them unconditionally in the name of God. For those who live in the “trenches,” it is not easy to be their joy in the way those who live in the city are their joy. To those priests who long to be there, to those priests who live in the “trenches,” thank you for your faithfulness in God’s kingdom. God continues to sustain us and to renew his call to us, touching us with his hands and speaking to us with his voice. How beautiful it is to be able to say: “Depart from me, you cursed, who covet the riches of eternal life” (Mk 8:11).

As you know, we are fiercely committed to caring for the outcasts and marginalized from society. Those who are excluded, those who suffer, and those who feel themselves abandoned are part of the mission of Jesus and his Church. In these times of trial, we need to return to the promise of the New Covenant: “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb 13:5). This is the promise of the Lord, who continues to trust us, to be present, and to call us to be witnesses. This is the promise of the Curé of Ars, who showed us that it is possible to be a faithful witness even in times of trial.

In these years, we have become more attentive to the care, often silent and unobserved, of our brother priests and sisters who were victims of the scandal of abuse. We are aware that there are priests who have suffered the consequences of this scandal, and we are aware that there are those who have suffered at the hands of others who have not suffered at the hands of others who have not been trusted to be close to their people. To those priests who have been a time of great suffering in the lives of their families and of the entire People of God, I want to say a word to each of you who, often without fanfare and at personal sacrifice, continue to put your lives on the line for the sake of the Gospel. In these times, we need to return to the promise of the New Covenant: “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb 13:5).

As we approach the end of this year, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who are attentive to the needs of our parishes and our communities. We are together in the mission of Jesus and his Church.

With a letter to his priests on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé of Ars, a model for perseverance in his faithfulness to the mission of Jesus and his Church.

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brother priest to order. “For his mercy endures forever.”

Thank you for your witness of perseverance, patient endurance (hypomone) in pastoral ministry. Often, with the pathos of the shepherd, you work long hours, assisting with the Lord in prayer, as Moses did in courageously interceding for the people (cf. Num 14:10-15; Ex 32:30-32; Dt 31:18-23). Thank you for your mercy endures forever.

Thank you for celebrating the Eucharist each day and for being merciful shepherds in the Sacranton of Reconciliation, neither rigorous nor lax, but discerned correctly for your people and accompanying them on their journey of conversion to Christ and of repentance. The Lord ex- pects on us all. We know that on the ladder of mercy we can descend to the depths of our human condi- tion — including weakness and sin — and at the same time experience the heights of divine perfection: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”14 In this way, we are “capable of warming people’s hearts, walking at their side in the dark, talking with them and even entering into their night and their darkness, without losing our hearts.”15 For his mercy endures forever.

Thank you for anointing and fervently proclaiming to all, “in season and out of season” (cf. 2 Tim 4:2) the Gospel of Jesus Christ, probing the heart of your community in or- der to ensure its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now bar- ren.16 “For his mercy endures forever.”

Thank you for the times when, with great emotion, you embraced sinners, healed wounds, warmed hearts and showed the tenderness and the ‘noble simplicity’ of a true, sincere, and diaristianitic (cf. Lk 10:23-25). Nothing is more necessary than this: accessibility, the ability to draw near to the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters. How powerful is the ex- ample of Jesus, who takes himself present and does not flee the wounds of his brothers and sisters? It mirrors the heart of a shepherd who has developed a spiritual taste for being one with his people, a priest who never forgets that he has come from them and that by serving them he will find and express his most pure and complete identity. This in turn will lead to adopting a simple and austere way of life, re- jecting privileges that have nothing to do with the Gospel. “For his mercy endures forever.”

Finally, let us give thanks for the holiness of the faithful People of God, whom we are called to shep- herd and through whom the Lord also speaks. He blesses us with the gift of contempt- platting that faithful People “in those parishes where children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in those deaconesses and deacons who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance, I see the holiness of the Church militant.” Let us be grateful for each of them, confront suffering. We can often act like the levite or the priest in the Holy City, stepping aside and ignoring the injured man (cf. Lk 10:30-35). Or we can draw near in the wrong way, making dangerous situations in aecom- mpany and taking refuge in commonplaces, such as: “That’s life...”, or “Nothing can be done”. In this way we yield to an unequal fate. Or else we can draw near with a kind of aloof- ness that brings only isolation and exclusion. “Like the prophet Jonah, we are constantly tempted to flee to a safe haven. It can have many names: individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world...”25 Far from making us compassionate, this ends up holding us back from confront- ing our own wounds, the wounds of others and consequently the wounds of Jesus himself.”26

Along these same lines, I would mention another subtle and danger- ous attitude, which, as Bernanos liked to say, is “the most precious of the devil’s potions”. It is also the most treacherous for those of us who would serve the Lord, for it breeds discouragement, desolation and despair.27 Disappointment with life, with the Church or with ourselves can tempt us to latch onto a sweet sorrow or sadness that the Eastern Fathers called acedia and that Saint Paul addressed to his com- munities: “I pray that you may not lose heart over [my sufferings]” (Php 3:19), and “I want [your] hearts to be encouraged” (Gal 2:2). In this way, we fail to carry out the mission that the Lord gives us anew each day: to proclaim “good news of great joy for all the people” (Lk 2:10). Not by presenting intellectual theories or moral axioms about the way things ought to be, but as men who in the midst of pain have been transformed and transfigured by the Lord and, like, can explain to you how you should be living now only by hearsay, but now I have seen you with my own eyes” (Job 42:5). Without this foundational experience, all of our hard work will only lead to frustra- tion and disappointment.

In our own lives, we have seen how “with Christ, joy is constantly born anew”!28 Although there are different stages in this experience, we know that, despite our fail- ures that sim, “with tenderness with new poet’s eyes, is always cap- able of restoring our joy, God makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and start anew.”29 That joy is not the fruit of our own thoughts or de- cisions, but of the confidence born of knowing the Lord Jesus’ words to Peter. At times of un- certainty, remember those words: “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail” (Lk 22:32). The Lord is the first to pray and fight for you and me, so that we enter fully into his own prayer. There may well be moments when we feel that our heart is that of a mother of Gethsemane, that most human and dramatic of Jesus’ prayers... For there we find supplication, sorrow, anguish and even bewilderment (Mt 14:33ff).”

We know that it is not easy to stand before the Lord and let our gaze examine our lives, heal our wounded hearts and cleanse our feet of the workers’ grime along the way, which now keeps us from moving forward. In prayer, we are silent and at peace, which reminds us that we are dis- ciples in need of the Lord’s help, and which frees us from the pes- simean tendency of “those who ul- timately trust only in their own strength” (Ps 35:2), because they observe certain rules.”

Dear brothers, Jesus, more than anyone, is aware of our efforts and our accomplishments, our failures and our mistakes. He is the first to tell us: “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:28-29).

In this prayer, we know that we are never alone. The prayer of a pas- tor embraces both the Spirit who cries out “Abba, Father!” (cf. Gal 4:4), and the people who have been entrusted to his care. Our mission and identity can be defined by this dialectic.

The prayer of a pastor is nour- ished and made incarnate in the heart of God’s People. It bears the heart of the community, the heart of the people, whom he silently pre- sents to the Lord to be anointed by the Holy Spirit. This is the hope of a pastor, who with trust and increase the Lord to care for our weaknesses as individuals and as a people. Yet we should also real- ize that it is in the prayer of God’s People that the heart of a pastor takes flesh and finds its proper place. This sets us free from looking for quick, easy, ready-made answers, it allows the Lord to be the one — not our own recipes and goals — to point out a path of hope. Let us not forget that at the most difficult times in the life of the earliest com- munity, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, prayer emerged as the true guiding force.

Brothers, let us indeed acknow- ledge our God. He transforms our Jesus transform them and send us forth anew to the mission. Let us never lose the joy of knowing that we are “the sheep of his flock” and that he is our Lord and Shepherd.

For our hearts to be encouraged, we should not be afraid to accept that determines our identity. First,
our relationship with Jesus. Whenev-
er we turn away from Jesus or neg-
lect our relationship with him, slowly but surely our commitment begins to fade and our lamps lose the oil needed to light up our lives (cf. Mt 25:3-30). "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me... because apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:4-5). In this regard, I would encourage you not to neglect spiritual direction. Look for a brother with whom you can speak, reflect, discuss and discern, sharing with complete trust and openness your journey. A wise brother with whom to share the experiences that make your relationship with Jesus grow. Find him, meet with him and enjoy his guid-
ance, accompaniment and counsel. This is an indispensable task to carry-
ning out your ministry in obedience to the will of the Father (cf. Heb 5:13-14). Learn your heart beat with "the mind that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). We can profit from the advice that marked his entire life.

The sacrifice of Jesus was not for naught. Jesus himself is the model of this evangel-
ization option that leads us to the heart of our people. How good it is for us to see him in his attention to every person! The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is nothing else but the culmination of that evangelizing style that marked his entire life.

Dear brother priests, the pain of so many victims, the pain of the people of God and our own person-
al pain, cannot be for naught. Jesus himself has brought this heavy bur-
den to his cross and he now asks us to be renewed in our mission of drawing near to those who suffer, of drawing near without embarrassment to heal broken hearts and minds and to make all these experiences our own, as eucharist. Our age, marked by old and new wounds, requires us to be builders of relationships and communion, open, trusting and aware of the necessity that the kingdom of God wishes to bring about every today. For it is a kingdom of forgiven sinners called to hear witness to the Lord's ever-

Our 60th anniversary of Holy Curé of Ars’ death

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

resent compassion. "For his mercy endures forever".

Our age, marked by drawing near without embarrassment to be renewed in our mission of carrying our cross and he now asks us to leave his priests as orphans; it can be felt not only in your heart... and that they have a place in her heart. And in looking at her, to hear once more that kind of like the Indian Juan Diego. "My youngest son, what is the matter? Do not let it disturb your heart. Am I not here, I who have the honour to be your mother?"

To contemplate Mary is "to be like once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her, we see that humility and tender-
erness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, who need not treat others poorly in order to feel im-
portant themselves."34

Perhaps at times our gaze can be-

ning stone" (cf. Lk 24:33), the risen Jesus. We, as Church, are built on him, and, even when we grow dis-
heartened and tempted to judge everything in the light of our fail-
ures, he comes to make all things new.35

May we allow our gratitude to awaken praise and renewed enthusi-
asm for our ministry of anointing and your ministry. For I am confid-
ent that "God takes away even the hardest stones against which our hopes and expectations crash: death, sin, fear, worldliness. Human history does not end before a tombstone, because today it encounters the liv-

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32  Cf. Apostolic Letter Anno Unuarius (31 March 1993): L’Osservatore Romano, 21 (1993), 320-321. 33  Address to the Italian Bishops’ Conference (30 May 2014). Spiritual fatherhood requires a bishop not to leave his priests as orphans; it can be felt not only in his readiness to open his doors to priests, but also to seek them out in order to care for them and to accom-
pany them.

34  Cf. Address to the Parish Priests of Rome (6 March 2019).


37  Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate, 5.

38  Apostolic Letter Misericordia et Misera, 13.

39  Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate, 50.

40  Ibid., 134.

41  Cf. JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO, Reflexiones en esperan-


43  Cf. BIASANUPHI OF GAZA, Letters, in VITO CUTRO – MICHAEL TADEUZ SZWEDZIK, Biscione di paternità (Wa-

45  Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 2.

46  Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 2.

47  Ibid., 137.

48  Cf. JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO, Reflexiones en esperan-


49  Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 94.

50  Meeting with Clergy, Consecrated Persons and Members of Pastoral Councils, Assisi (4 October 2015).


52  Cf. NICASIO OF MOPHOS, 118, 119.

53  Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 288.


55  Homily at the Easter Vigil (30 April 2019).
Women of the parables
An overview of female characters in the New Testament

CAROLYN OSIEK

A quick overview of women in Jesus’ parables shows us two different types of female characters: women who are explicitly present in the story and those whose presence is implied, with a quick look at a third type: those who should be there but are strangely absent.

First of all, we must remember that most in-flected languages, ancient Greek among them, use masculine plural nouns and adjectives not only for a group of men but also for a mixed group of men and women. Thus it is difficult to know whether in many passages an all-male or mixed group is intended. An example of this is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-15). Because the speaker is male, we assume all the workers are male. But harvesting grapes and olives was a family effort. It could well have been a mixed group of family units, consisting of men, women, and children that were hired for the grape harvest.

Another example is the story of the guests invited to the banquet (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24). First-century rural Galilee was not such a male-dominated culture that women did not also attend meals on important occasions. How we imagine the guests, both invited and uninvited, depends on our own presuppositions.

By their very nature, parables take the ordinary stuff of life and turn it slightly so that it reverberates in a different dimension with new meaning. Women, like men, are usually doing in parables what they do all the time: in this case, preparing food, attending a wedding, giving birth, and keeping the household finances. Before bread can be made, the harvested grain has to be ground into flour by hand with mortar and pestle, definitely women’s work. So two women are grinding grain together, making the flour for their daily bread. But as eschatological illustration, only one remains after the other has been snatched away in an apocalyptic moment (Matt 24:41; Luke 17:33). Did the one left behind know what happened? Did she mourn the loss of her companion or rejoice in her new identity?

A woman bakes bread by putting leaven in a lump of moistened flour, something that women in Mediterranean societies did daily. But instead of just mixing it in, she leaves it in a very large amount of flour – three measures, equivalent to about 25 kilograms. The oddity of the small amount of leaven hidden in a very large lump of dough becomes the mysterious hidden work of the Kingdom (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:19). Is the woman baker even perhaps an image of God who infuses the ordinary with new life?

Now for the party-goes. A shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find the lost sheep and rejoices with his men-friends and neighbors that the lost has been found (Luke 15:3-6). Likewise, a woman who has lost a coin sweeps and searches until she finds it, and then has a party with her women friends and neighbors because the lost coin has been found (15:8-10); finally, the father rejoices when his lost son has returned and throws a party to celebrate, to the chagrin of the older son (15:11-32). While Matthew only gives us the shepherd who searches for the lost sheep (Matt 18:11-13), Luke creates gender balance by adding this story of the woman with her lost coin. The parable of the woman with the lost coin is the central element of the trilogy about lost and found.

In Luke’s plan the gender balance is important between the male shepherd and the female householder. We must remember, however, that not only men were shepherds. The parable of the shepherd is interpreted so heavily out of Jesus’ self-identification as shepherd in John that it is difficult for us to remember that women, even young girls, were also shepherds, such as Rachel (Gen 29:5-6) or the daughters of Jethro (Ex 2:16). While this shepherd is intentionally male, the other texts tell us that shepherds came in both genders.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus uses the story of a woman who will not give up to illustrate the need for persistence in prayer (Luke 18:1-8). A widow seeks justice against someone who has exploited her, and she will not let the judge rest until he gives her what she demands. “Justice,” though, is perhaps the wrong translation for ἐκδίκησις. It is more like vengeance that she wants against her opponent: she wants to be proved right and get the compensation she deserves. It is an odd story that does not lend itself to allegory, even though the introduction (v. 1) suggests that the widow is a model of prayer and someone who beseeches the powerful authority figure, therefore God. But not this judge! He neither fears God nor respects human authority – hardly a paragon of honor. In spite of numerous biblical injunctions to treat widows justly (for example, Ex 22:22-24 and Deut 24:19), she wants to ignore her, hoping she will give up and go away. The judge is in fact living unrightfully himself by not rendering just judgment. But everyone has his or her limits, and this widow knows how to push him beyond his. Though he has no moral values, he will do what she wants just to get rid of her. He does not fear God or respect people, but he does fear the damage that this pushy widow could do to him. Most translations suggest in v. 5 that she will wear him out, or wear him down. The word used there, ἐκδίκησις, can mean to torment, but it has stronger connotations of actual physical assault, of striking in the face. Perhaps he fears that if she becomes sufficiently frustrated to attack him, to slap him in public, she will be shamed and look ludicrous light- ing off a mere woman. Quite an unusual story to exemplify prayer!

The parable of the young women guests attending a wedding is obscure with regard to how it reflects actual practices of wed- ding ritual, but one thing is clear: five of the young women have not prepared as they should have. Like those in every culture who fail to look ahead, they are left behind and lose out for lack of preparedness. Their unpreparedness carries a dimension of eschatological perspective – he ready when the bridegroom comes! But parables can be approached from many sides, and it is also worth asking about the wider context, and whether the other five who did bring enough oil could not have shared some with them and still gotten where they wanted to go. They are not generous, fearful that they will run out of oil and so caring only about themselves. Instead of one group pitted against the other, a spirit of cooperation would perhaps have enabled all of them to enter the celebration together. Is this a par-
An overview of female characters in the New Testament

caused by family obligation and a confusing array of men to whom she is expected to relate. Would anyone have asked her what she wanted in the matter? In the legis-
lation of Deuteronomy, it is the woman who takes the initiative to-ward the successive marriage if the brother is unwilling (Deut 25:7-10). The parable is of course a trick brought by the opponents of Jesus, the Sadducees who denied belief in resurrection after death, to see if they can reduce him to silence. In-
stead, Jesus turns the whole en-
counter into a teaching on the tran-
scendence of resurrection life beyond human institutions, and the woman is no longer faced with such a di-
lemma.

There are also strange absences of women in some of the familiar par-
ables. In Luke 15:8-9, a householder has a neighbor friend with sudden late visitors and insufficient provi-
sions, so he goes next door to see if he can borrow some bread. The one who is asked at first refuses because the door is locked, and he and his children are in bed. Nevertheless, because of the persistence of the neighbor at the door, he will get up and, like the unjust judge, give his neighbor what he wants just to get rid of him. But where is his wife, who would be the one to decide about giving away food in the house? Would she be just as resistant to helping a neighbor in need? Is that the reason she is not mentioned in the story?

Another strange missing woman is in the parable of the lost son, or the two sons, or the merciful father (Luke 15:21-32), the third story of Luke's trilogy on lost and found. The story itself seems to be Luke's expansion of the simpler Matthean parable of a father and his two sons who respond in different ways, one by saying "yes" and not doing what he is asked, the other by saying "no" but doing it anyway (Matt 21:28). Upon reading the story, one won-
ers what role the mother might have played in allowing the young man to go off stupidly on his own, and to cajole the older son into be-
ing less resistant to having once again to share his parents' affection. In Rembrandt's famous painting of the younger son kneeling at his father's feet, asking to be taken back, there is a shadowy unidentified figure in the background whom some have interpreted as the missing mother.

We could continue to ask about missing women: were they among the guests and even the passersby invited to the great supper (Matt 22:1-10), or the poor, crippled, blind, and lame (Luke 14:16-24)? Surely they are among the crowd from all nations who are to be judged on the last day by how they treated others; feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned — and wom-

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al life, which can turn into an offense against the dig-

ty of the person and the Truth itself, which is al-

ways Christ, Lord and Head of the Church.

In the careful safekeeping of the sacramental seal and the necessary discretion linked to the internal ex-
tra-sacramental forum and to the other acts of ministry shines a particular synthesis of the Petrine and Marian dimensions in the Church.

With Peter, the Bride of Christ guards, until the end of history, the institutional ministry of the power of the keys", like Mary Most Holy, the Church keeps "all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:51), knowing that in them the light that illuminates every man is reverber-
ated and that, in the sacred space between personal conscience and God, it must be preserved, defended and safeguarded.

The Supreme Pontiff Francis, on 21 June 2019, approved the present Note, and ordered its publication.

Given in Rome, from the seat of the Apostolic Penitentiary, 29 June, Year of the Lord 2019, on the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles.

Card. Mauro Piacenza, Major Penitentiary
Mons. Krzysztof Nykiel, Regent

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able about eschatological prepara-
tion or about lack of generosity, or both? (Matt 25:11-12).

The Gospel of John has no exten-
ded story parables, but it is rich in images and metaphors: water, bread of life, good shepherd and door of the sheep, vine and branches. One brief allusion draws on women's fundamental experience of giving birth. The woman who is about to give birth is sorrowful, knowing that there is much pain ahead. But once the pain is past, her sorrow turns to joy because a new life has entered the world (John 16:21). The ordinary, daily, and yet life-threatening event of the birth of a child becomes, as it so often is in the human imagina-
tion, the dawn of new life and new perspectives, a starting over.

So far we have graders of grain and bakers of bread, keepers of coins, unmarried girls at a wedding, a pushy widow, and a woman about to give birth. As we move into con-
sideration of the women characters who are not direct actors in the par-
ables, we encounter the ugly face of slavery as it was practiced in the Roman world. The parable of the unfor-
serving slave (Matt 18:23-35) is a tragic one. Because of a mounting and unpayable debt, a slave who had been entrusted with a king's wealth and mishandled it finds him-
self facing the sale not only of him-
self but of his wife and children and all his possessions to satisfy the debt (v 25). His whole family faces uprooting and uncertainty about

4 Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Spe Salvi (30 November, 2007), n. 22.
5 Francis, Address to the participants in the XXX Course on the Internal Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary (25 March, 2003).
6 Benedict XVI, Colloquium with the priests (10 June 2001).
7 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theolo-

giae

8 John Paul II, Address to the Apostolic Penitentiary, 12 March 1994.
10 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes (7 December 1965), n. 22.
11 Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Spe Salvi (9 December 2005), n. 22.
12 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration Dominus Iesus on the uniqueness and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church (6 August 2000).
13 V. De Paolis – E. Ucci, Le san-
zioni nella Chiesa. Commento al Ca-
14 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theolo-

giae, Suppl., I, 2, ad 2.
Not honey but salt of the earth

A letter of encouragement and support

by those priests, “forgiven sinners”—as the Pope also defines himself—who have experienced and continue to experience, who leave the initiative to God and follow him in the service of their communities.

There was a need for a word of encouragement, esteem, closeness. There was a need for an expression of gratitude like that contained in the pages of the papal letter. So that the pain caused to the ecclesial body by the infidelities of the few—as happened with the terrible scourge of abuse—would not risk obscuring the memory of the fidelity lived by the many, despite the many efforts and human limitation.

For this reason Pope Francis wished to thank those who still today offer their entire existence to God, serving him in his people, and renew that initial “yes” of their vocation by remembering the care received.

ANDREA TORNIELLI

Bernanos’ Diary of a Country Priest, and the great spiritual tradition, quoting Cardinal Tomáš Spilík and effectively defraying the costs as suavitatem which leads to “disencouragement, desolation and despair”, that is, the “paralyzing” desire to persevere in our work and prayer; it makes us hard to ‘live with’, and “can turn into a habit and lead us slowly to accept evil and injustice by quietly telling us: ‘It has always been like this’”. In the same novel the great French writer, precisely against that sweet sorrow, has a priest say that “the good God did not write that we should be the honey of the earth... but the salt”. Here one discovers the good ‘service’ that literature can offer: to give that needed jolt to those bombarded by the ‘privateness’ of life. The Pope effectively summarizes it, just as he explains the risk of acedia, using simple words: “Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears. But the good, poetic or spiritual books that can certainly open our eyes and ears, are not enough on their own, rather, they might support another temptation, which the Pope calls the ‘metempsychotic tendency’; thus more is required: prayer. “In prayer, we experience the blessed ‘insecurity’ which reminds us that we are disciples in need of the Lord’s help, and which frees us from the promethean tendency of ‘those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules’.”

Here the third aspect is introduced: that of temptation, first and foremost meaning wanting to distance oneself from pain and thus from the person suffering. It is a temptation colored by intellectualism when, instead, the pious vocation and mission should be faced not as ‘intellectual theories or moral axioms about the way things ought to be, but as men who in the midst of pain have been transformed and transfigured by the Lord and, like Job, can exclaim: ‘I knew you then only by hearsay, but now I have seen you with my own eyes’ (Job 42:5).”

All is well and good; as long as there is no hazard of sliding into the opposite promethean tendency (the two ever present heresies, gnosis and pelagianism), we are saved from this by the awareness that faith is not only ours but belongs to God; it is his eternal mercy. It is no printing-press error that the exclamation of Psalm 136—“his mercy endures forever”—is repeated dozens of times in the letter; we can be merciful every so often, but God is mercy, and we can be so only in the measure to which we allow it to act within us. And should this not suffice; the Pope is extremely clear on this point:

“In effect, we show that we continue to believe in God, who has never broken his covenant, despite our having broken it; that we continue to believe in the mystery of the Church, which celebrates the fidelity of God, who continues to trust us, to believe in us and to count on us, despite all our sins and failings, and who invites us to be faithful in turn.” As he previously wrote in Gaudete et Exsultate: “the lack of a heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgment of our limitations prevents grace from working.”

At the end of reading this text that the Successor of Peter has sent to all his brother priests, one is reminded of another moving literary passage on the mystery of acedia, written by British novelist G.K. Chesterton: “When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He chose for its cornerstone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob, a coward—in a word, a man. And upon this rock He has built His Church, and the gates of Hell have not prevailed against it. All the empires of the world have failed, because of this inherent and continual weakness, that they were founded by strong men and upon strong men. But this one thing, the historic Catholic Church, was founded on a weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible. For no chain is stronger than its weakest link.”
Violence and redemption

Documentary entitled ‘Flannery’ to be released in the US this fall

Flannery O’Connor

FAITH AND IMAGINATION

Mark Bosco, SJ

“Flannery O’Connor is unique. There is no one like her. You can’t lump her in with Faulkner, you can’t lump her with Walker Percy, you can’t lump her with anyone.” So proclaims American novelist Alice McDermott about Flannery O’Connor’s place in the canon of 20th century literature. Her statement echoes many of the novelists, artists, and literary critics who were asked the same question as part of a feature length documentary called Flannery that premieres in the United States this fall. Part biography and part an exploration of O’Connor’s stories, the film offers a glimpse into the life of this remarkable artist. Four aspects of her life converge in the film: faith, race, gender, and disability. O’Connor was a devout and intellectually formed Roman Catholic; a person of the intellectual ferment of Catholicism and its larger historical moment in modern American life during the years when O’Connor was writing. The Catholic peculiarly possessed of a sense of crisis, “haunted” by religious belief. O’Connor’s religious faith is central to her literary vision. The film struggles to find a way to honor her Catholic intellectual and imaginative world as part of the greatness of her work, all the while acknowledging that many who watch the film will have no understanding of Catholicism or be dismissive of religious faith altogether. Throughout her life O’Connor immersed herself in the currents of the 20th century Catholic revival, a hermeneutic of the modern consciousness unhaunted by religious belief. To capture this idea, we have been concerned that we find a critical way to interrogate the complexity of racism in both her life, her work, and in her manners. We rely how O’Connor tells a friend that she became an intellectuality that demands that what O’Connor might call the “Catholic” sense of modernity undergirds many of her stories and characters, whether from “The Artificial Nigger,” the rejection of race was everywhere in the working class of the developing civil rights movement and its effect on the workforce and the civil rights revolution. The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O’Connor, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 90.

As the work on the documentary became more involved, it became clear that we had to tackle forthrightly O’Connor and racism. As a white woman of some degree of purity, she lived through the last years of the Jim Crow South and the rigid class system of peoples that it engendered. She was slow to grasp the magnitude of the developing civil rights movement and its effect on the country. Years of concern knowing that O’Connor was shaped by the racist and segregated world in which she lived. I was concerned that we find a critical act, that demands that what O’Connor is one of the few writers who is not afraid to look into the darkness. That darkness, what O’Connor might call the burden of original sin, haunts us today. O’Connor’s stories are redemptive acts because they send us, the readers, to look inside ourselves, where “something in us, as storytellers and as listeners to stories, demands the redemptive act, that demands that what falls at least he offered the chance to be restored”.¹


² Ibid.


Photo by Erin Landier
Pope Francis talks about the relationship with earthly goods and warns against covetousness, the root of war

On Sunday morning, 4 August, Pope Francis offered a reflection on the day’s Gospel passage which focused on man’s relationship with earthly goods. After reciting the Marian prayer, he expressed his closeness to the “defenceless people in Texas, California and Ohio” who had recently fallen victims to several mass shootings in the United States. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s reflection, which he delivered in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

Today’s Gospel passage (cf. Lk 12:13-21) begins with the narrative of a man who stands up among the multitude and asks Jesus to settle a legal matter concerning a family dispute. However, Jesus does not address the matter in his reply, but rather urges the people to consider covetousness, that is, the greed of possession. In order to divert his listeners from this exhausting search for wealth, Jesus tells the parable of the foolish rich man who believes he is happy because he has had the good fortune to reap an exceptional harvest and he feels secure thanks to the goods he has accumulated. It would do you good to read it today; it is in the 12th Chapter of Saint Luke, verse 17. It is a beautiful parable that teaches us a great deal. The narrative comes to the fore in the contrast between “and the rich man plans for himself and what God plans for him instead.”

The rich man puts three considerations before his soul, that is, himself: the accumulated goods, the many years that these goods appear to ensure him, and thirdly tranquility and unrestrained enjoyment (cf v. 15). But the word that God addresses to him nullifies his plans. Instead of “many years”, God points to the immediacy of “this night; tonight you will die”. Instead of the “enjoyment of life”, He presents him with “surrendering his life in order to live the life to God” with the ensuing judgment. Regarding the reality of the ample goods accumulated on which the rich man had based everything, it becomes shrouded in sarcasm by the question: “and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (v. 20). Let us think about quarrels over inheritance, many family quarrels. And how many people, we all know some stories about many people, who turn up at the time of death: nephews, grandchildren come around to see: “what is my share?”, and they cart everything away. It is within this contrast that the term “fool” – because he thinks about things that he believes to be concrete but that are fantasy – with which God addresses this man, is justified. He is foolish because in practice he has denied God, he has not taken Him into account.

The end of the parable re-counted by the Evangelist is uniquely effective: “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (v. 21). It is a warning which reveals the horizon towards which we are called to look. Material goods are necessary – they are goods! – but they are a means to live honestly and in sharing with the neediest. Today, Jesus invites us to consider that wealth can enslave the heart and distract it from the true treasure which is in heaven. Saint Paul also reminds us of this in today’s second reading. It says “seek the things that are above... Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col 3:1-2).

It is understood that this does not mean estranging oneself from reality, but rather seeking the things that have true value: justice, solidarity, welcome, fraternity, peace, all things that make up the true dignity of mankind. It is a case of leading a life that is fulfilled not according to a worldly manner, but rather according to the style of the Gospel: to love God with all one’s being, and love one’s neighbour as Jesus loved him, that is, in service and in giving oneself. Covetousness of goods, the desire to have goods, does not satisfy the heart, but rather causes more hunger! Covetousness is like those tasty candies: you take one and say: “Ah! It is so good”, and then you take another; and one follows the other. Such is covetousness: it never satisfies. Be careful! Love that is understood and lived [in the style of the Gospel] is the source of true happiness, whereas the exaggerated search for material goods and wealth is often a source of anxiety, adversity, abuse of power, war. Many wars begin from covetousness.

May the Virgin Mary help us not to be attracted by forms of security that fade, but rather to be credible witnesses of the eternal values of the Gospel, each day.

After the Angelus, the Holy Father continued:

Dear brothers and sisters, I am spiritually close to the victims of the episodes of violence which in recent days have caused bloodshed to defenceless people in Texas, California and Ohio in the United States. I invite you to join me in praying for those who have lost their lives, for the injured and their relatives. Hail Mary...

The Holy Curé d’Ars, an example of kindness and charity for all priests, died 160 years ago today. On this significant occasion, I wished to send a Letter to all the priests throughout the world, to encourage them in their fidelity to the mission to which the Lord has called them. May the witness of this humble parish priest wholly dedicated to his people help us to rediscover the beauty and importance of the priestly ministry in contemporary society.

I greet you all, people of Rome and pilgrims from different countries: families, associations, individual faithful.

Today, there are various groups of young people present. I greet you with great affection. Where there are young people there is noise and this is a grace. In particular, I greet the women’s basketball team from the American universities of New Mexico and Nebraska; the youth pastoral group from Verona; the young people from Ponte di Brenta, Entratico, Ceresè; the Seminararians from the Minor Seminary of Bergamo.

I wish you all a happy Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. Arrivedereli!