

other Christs continue his work of transforming the world by cleansing it from sin, and re-creating it in the Spirit (see Gen. 2:1). Since the mandate of Christ is both to forgive and to retain sin, the duty incumbent on the ministers of Christ is to judge the sins of the believers. But one cannot judge without the believers making known their sins, or confessing them.

**Second Reading:** A passage rich in content. Paul writes to the Corinthian community which experienced the abundance of the Spirit's charismatic outpouring. Yet he makes that the primary activity of the indwelling Spirit is to enable the Christian to confess the divinity and sovereignty of Jesus (12:3). Only then does he mention the gifts of the Spirit (which include here various ministries and functions). Moreover, it is the same identical Spirit at work in everyone, imparting his gifts to the individual members as he pleases, but all for the benefit of the whole body (v. 7). Comparing the Body of Christ with the human body, Paul shows the necessity of variety of functions. That all should have the same function is against the very notion of an organized body. So also in the Body of Christ, each member contributes in his own way and by means of his particular gift to the good of the whole community. What one member accomplishes affects all the others.

The reality of our incorporation into the Body-Person of Christ is clearly asserted by authors today. "Baptism incorporates the Christian into the risen, glorified Body of Christ, so that the Church is the manifestation and extension of the Lord's Body in this world. Its members share in the life of the Risen Lord" (Jerome Bibl. Comm.). Paul can speak of "drinking of the Spirit" since Jesus referred to the Spirit as the "Living Water" (Jn. 4:10; 7:38f).

## II. HOMILIES

### FLORES DE MAYO

(For the month of May)

It is a beautiful and meaningful custom to bring flowers to the shrine of our Blessed Mother during the month of May which is devoted to her special honor. What may seem puerile to the sophisticated is a custom of deep significance and worthy of every child of God. What son is not pleased when honor is done to his mother? And is the Son of Mary less pleased when his brothers and sisters honor their Mother and his?

In the gift of flowers, the giver intends to give joy to her who is the loving Mother of all God's children. Flowers are the beautiful objects of God's creation, and they mirror the loveliness of the heavenly Father. Mary's children come to offer these beauties of God's creation to show their love by a humble act of homage. Our Lady is not particular about the costliness of the flowers. It is just the fact that her children take the trouble to gather them out of love to bring them to her shrine that gives her joy.

But there is a deeper significance. The giver wishes to give himself along with the gift of flowers. It is a renewal of a pledge to be the faithful children of her who gave us Jesus, Son of God, Savior and Redeemer. In the flowers we offer ourselves with confidence that in accepting our gifts, Mary will keep us safe from all the harm and all the wiles of the Evil One. Moreover, we trust that Mary will win for us all the graces we need, provided we offer our flowers and our hearts with good intention, pure minds, free of all hatred of neighbor. To lack these dispositions in offering our flowers would not please the Mother of God at all.

Even the flowers are symbolic, for many of them call to mind some virtue that is eminent in Mary and ought to be our aim and striving also. The rose stands for love, love of God and genuine love of one's neighbor, for its fragrance spreads in all directions. The lily and those flowers that resemble it stand for purity, that virtue so dear to the Immaculate One. The humble daisies and the asters signify simplicity and humility, virtues so prominent in Mary's life. The buoganvillas remind us of Mary's generosity and fidelity. Even the colors of the flowers symbolize various virtues in the minds of the faithful.

In offering our flowers, then, we are pledging to practice those virtues which they symbolize. Mary's life was a magnificent bouquet of virtues that delighted the heart of her divine Son, and rose up as a fragrant offering to the most Blessed Trinity. Children offering these flowers can represent their parents and brothers and sisters, and thus commend the entire family to Mary's care, pledging that they will endeavor to live those virtues which made Mary's life so pleasing to God.

(Note: Topics for homilies on these occasions could be some thoughts on the individual meaning of the flowers; again, one could take various invocations of the Litany of the Bl. Virgin especially the last twelve. Or again, a different scene of Mary's life could be reflected in different flowers, for succeeding occasions).

**SECURE IN THE HANDS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

**May 1, 1977: Fourth Sunday of Easter.**

**The Human Situation:** Everyone seeks security. That is why the laborer allows part of his salary to be deducted each month, so that he can eventually enjoy Social Security in an emergency. That is why people pay a monthly premium when taking out various insurance policies, so that they have the assurance to meet unexpected situations such as sickness or accident, should they arise. That is why the employee keeps faithfully at his job for long years, so as to be able to retire with a suitable pension when the time comes. All that gives a man a feeling of security for this life. What will give security for the life to come?

**The Good News:** The Christian enjoys the greatest security for this life and the life to come in the knowledge that the Good Shepherd knows him and that he is in his hands. The Good Shepherd knows his every need and longing, and has the keenest interest in each and every individual for which he died. This is the message of today's gospel when Jesus says: I know my sheep, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. In the hands of the Good Shepherd we are entirely safe, for they are the hands of the Omnipotent and all-knowing God. Jesus and the Father are caring for us.

But this care is not merely for this short and fleeting life, although here too his love manifests itself daily in countless ways. Yet, life on earth is a testing ground and it will have its ups and downs, its trials and sufferings. Yet, the Good Shepherd will always be there to turn to. In all these trials he is the anchor of hope, the source of strength. But the main purpose of the Good Shepherd goes far beyond helping one in this life's troubles. His aim is to impart life without any alloy of sorrow or pain, with no further fear of accident, sickness or death, life that is not fleeting or passing, life that has no end. This life that the Good Shepherd wishes to impart is the only life worthy of the name. That is why he gave himself up to death, in order to conquer death and import life eternal to his sheep, by rising from the dead glorious and immortal, to give them a share of that immortal and glorious life which he possesses in fullest measure.

However, there is a condition, and that condition is that we hear his voice and follow him. To hear his voice, it is necessary to be willing to listen carefully amid all the noise and confusing clamor of the world, in order to be able to recognize the genuine

voice of Christ. He speaks clearly to us in his Gospel. He speaks clearly to us through those whom he has placed as shepherds over his flock, for he said: He who hears you, hears me (Jn. 13:20). Then, after recognizing the voice of Christ it is necessary to follow the way he has laid out for us, for only then will we be secure. No one can steal a sheep from the all-watchful eyes of Christ. It is only the passions and the evil in a man that make him wander off for forbidden pastures that take him away from Christ. And even then, the Good Shepherd never ceases to search out the lost sheep to bring it back to himself and let it experience once more the security and the peace of being again in the embrace of Christ.

Christ found no better image to depict his continued care for us than that of the good shepherd. All the great figures of old whom God gave the care of his people to were shepherds: Abraham, Moses and David. A shepherd is not merely a leader, but one who cares for each little lamb of his flock with almost a mother's tenderness, protecting it that no hostile power carry it off. That is why Jesus entrusted his flock to Peter under the figure of a shepherd, and Paul calls those placed over the faithful by the same name (Acts 20:28). Through each of them Christ himself feeds and cares for his flock.

Father and Son are one in their love for man, in their continued concern for each one whom they have created according to their image and likeness. Father and Son are one in their great love for each human heart, to draw it to themselves in eternal love. Father and Son are one in letting no stone unturned to manifest that love all during life's journey. Father and Son are one in the infinite Spirit of Love which they wish to communicate in full to man, so that he shares with them their community of love.

**Our Response:** It is not always easy to listen to the voice of Christ. Our own will and spirit often pull in the opposite direction, like sheep are drawn toward poisonous pastures, so inviting and so promising. It will mean a determined conquering of passions and inordinate desires. It will mean the breaking of a will accustomed to sinful ways. Yet, the following of Christ is the only guarantee of happiness and security both in this life and in eternity. If we are willing to give up so much to have the benefits of social security and insurance policies, what folly it is not to be willing to give up what can only ruin our eternal security and well-being that never ends.

## UNSUNG HEROES

**May 8, 1977: Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**The Human Situation:** The world always celebrates its heroes and rightly so. Who does not feel inspired by the extraordinary efforts exerted by the men at Corregedor to hold the fort against all odds? Who does not admire the incredible endurance of the men who suffer as did the men on the Death March to Tarlac? Every country has its heroes. They are the inspiration that goads on the youth to follow in their footsteps to accomplish great things.

**The Good News:** But there are also many unsung heroes known only to God. They are carrying out Jesus' commandment of love "to love one another as he has loved them", and this they endeavor to do to the utmost, cost what may. They may never make the headlines of the newspapers, nor Newswatch of the TV. The stage need not be the battlefield nor an olympic meet. It can be an ordinary home where a mother struggles against all odds to raise her family when the husband has been permanently disabled through sickness or accident. It can be many one of the many hospital staffs where doctors and nurses work round the clock for days on end, when an epidemic hits the place and there is great lack of proper help. It can be a selfless man or woman who risks life itself to save someone in extreme danger. It can be a lonely missionary at his station where the care of thousands of scattered Christians claims his endless attention as a true shepherd of his flock. Heroism does not depend on the place. It depends on a man's heart and mind and determination. Love is the driving power in each of these instances and countless others. To love one's fellowman as Christ loved us means nothing less than to love even unto death.

To care for an aged parent who has become feebleminded and burdensome demands love that may reach heroic heights. To remain faithful to a wife whose incurable disease renders her helpless to be the counterpart in life that every husband needs, will call for great supernatural love, because man's nature alone could not bear it. The news media abound in reports of accidents, fires, violence, hold-ups, but seldom do they display the men and women who could inspire the rest of their fellowmen by their lives of heroic love. And this is what the world needs, not news of violence and hatred. The news media in heaven will give us one surprise after another of noble men and women who took to heart the last will and testament of a loving Savior: Love one another as I have loved you.

In July 1941 in a Nazi concentration camp, a prisoner had escaped from Block 14. The camp commander announced that if the prisoner were not back in 24 hours, ten of the six hundred men of that Block, selected at random, would be executed in reprisal. From morning till evening the entire Block was made to stand in the burning heat of the sun and many collapsed during the day. At six in the evening the Colonel in charge began to pick the ten men at random. One of them who had been singled out cried out in agony: "My wife! My poor children!" At that moment Franciscan Father Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward, offering to take the place of the agonizing husband. The entire Block was stunned at such selfless heroism. Glaring at the priest, the Colonel muttered: "Are you crazy?" "No," replied the priest, "but I am alone in the world and this man has a family to live for." The Colonel's gaze faltered. "Accepted" he muttered, and turned away. Father Kolbe strode up beaming with joy, and took the place of the amazed father and husband. He gave his life for him. He loved him as Christ had loved in the first place.

**Our Response:** Such opportunities do not come to everyone, but the all-seeing eye of God is well aware of the thousand and one opportunities to do one's duty well, day after day and week after week. Even in the little things of life, love can manifest itself to a very high degree. Love is inventive. It finds ways and means to give itself to others to come to their aid.

## THE CHRISTIAN'S HIDDEN TREASURE

May 15, 1977: Sixth Sunday of Easter

**The Human Situation:** Some years ago, a shepherd lad, searching along the shores of the Dead Sea in Palestine for a stray goat that had scurried up a steep cliff, followed the goat only to see it disappear into a cave. Entering the cave, the lad found large jars, some broken, others still intact, containing rolled up scrolls with Hebrew writing on them. Unaware of their identity and value, the lad stuffed as many as he could into the long pockets of his flowing garment, and later sold them for a very meager price in Bethlehem to a dealer. Those documents proved to be the famous Dead Sea Scrolls which have caused such a sensation in recent years, and they eventually sold for the equivalent of over two million pesos. The lad had no idea of the treasure he was carrying.

**The Good News:** Many Christians are totally unaware of the priceless treasure they are carrying with them. Nobody would believe it if the Lord himself had not said so in plain words in today's

Gospel: "Any one who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him always". This is the stupendous mystery of the divine Indwelling of the Father and the Son who are always united with their Spirit of Love, the Indwelling of the most blessed Trinity in the heart of little man. The sensual man is little affected by this word of the Lord, and the carnal man even less so, for their thoughts and desires lie in a different direction. But to the sincere follower of Christ, the divine Indwelling is an overwhelming reality, great in its potential for each individual Christian. It is his greatest Treasure.

This Treasure is not appreciated by most Christians because many do not take the trouble to ponder on it. If we do not ponder on this marvellous reality, this Treasure we carry within us, it will evidently not be valued as it ought to be, just like the shepherd lad who was unaware of the real value of the treasure he carried with him. Even the majority of Christians think of God usually as enthroned in heaven above, far away, surrounded by the heavenly court. Yet our Lord tells us in today's gospel, that for those who truly love him and endeavor to live his gospel-message, the infinite God, holy and triune, Father, Son and Spirit, have taken up a permanent abode right within them. This is not something we can conger up in our imagination. It is a reality to be accepted on divine faith, relying solely on the word of Jesus who revealed in plainest terms that it is really so. And the Scripture tells us that "the just man lives by faith". It is this faith in the divine Indwelling that ought to be fostered and increased. It is not a matter of feeling God's presence; it is a matter of believing it with our whole heart, and appreciating it. Those who do so will experience the effects of his Presence by the joy of spirit and the peace of heart which is theirs.

There are various ways to foster awareness of this heavenly Treasure. We can remind ourselves of it when making the sign of the cross attentively and deliberately. By becoming more aware of the indwelling holy Trinity one become more aware of his own Christian dignity to be the dwelling place of Father, Son and Spirit, the community of love. That growing awareness will urge him on to avoid offending such a holy and loving divine Guest, by turning away from anything in words or deeds that offend the good God. Then again, the peace and joy that he experiences in the awareness of his divine Treasure will manifest itself to others around him, so that they will see his good works and glorify God whom he bears within him.

An example of what youths aware of their Christian dignity can do is what took place in June 1976. Youth leaders represent-

ing over one hundred Kabataan Barangay units of four metropolitan cities and thirteen municipalities petitioned the government to enforce strictly all laws regarding beer gardens, cocktail lounges, saunas and massage clinics in the vicinity of schools, churches and similar institutions, since they realized they were a vicious threat to the morals of youth and people in general. This concentrated effort and outspoken petition made with courage and righteous indignation had a decided effect. It was one of the most important causes for the improvement of existing conditions in those places.

**Our Response:** Why does God desire to be so close to the heart of little man? Because he loves him immensely. He died for him to save him from eternal frustration. He does not merely live enthroned high above, but is enthroned deep in the heart of man as a community of Love: Father, Son, and Spirit, awaiting our response of love. Ought not the heart of man respond to such love of his God?

### **ALL GLORY AND HONOR BE TO CHRIST, SAVIOR OF THE WORLD**

**May 22, 1977: Solemnity of the Lord's Ascension.**

The glorious feast of the Ascension closes the cycle of Christ's visible life on earth. From now on he will live unseen in the midst of the believing community, but dynamically active through his Spirit, and ever present in the most holy Sacrament of the altar. Two themes stand out in the celebration of today's feast: the Father's full acceptance of his Son's life of sacrifice, and the powerful activity of the glorified Christ at the Father's right hand.

Acceptance by the Father marks the summit of all his earthly endeavors. His own people in their leaders had dubbed him a malefactor and false pretender, condemned him as a criminal and handed him over to the pagan authorities. Roman justice in cowardice failed to change the verdict, and Pilate sent him to the horrible death on the cross. Earth rejected its only salvation, but all heaven vindicated the incarnate Son of God, Savior and King of the universe. In his glorious ascension he is exalted above all the choirs of angels and above the entire universe of created intelligences, acknowledged by all heaven as the victorious Lamb of God worthy of all adoration, praise and glory.



Now his tears of childhood days win tears of repentance for countless sinners the world over, who reflect in deep compunction on the humiliation of him who, though in the form of God, deigned to become a slave for love of them. Now his youthful victory over himself and his noble continence win the victory for youth in every situation and temptation, so that they find ways and means to lead a life worthy of the sons of God. Now his labors for long years at the carpenter's bench obtain courage and endurance for men in every walk of life who labor and toil to make a decent living for themselves and their families, and thus come to their heavenly reward. Now his long hours of healing the sick and preaching the word of God give energy and zeal to his ministers and countless witnesses over the globe, so that they can continue to spread the kingdom which he inaugurated, and thus offer men the means of salvation. Now his awful sufferings and cruel death on the wood of the cross win perseverance for mortal man in all his sufferings, and give him hope in the throes of death, so that they too may share in the glory he has received from the Father, as a reward for his life of love and submission to the will of God. Now Christ is vindicated, and lives forever in the glory of the Father.

At the throne of God Christ is now the great High Priest. Having been lifted up in glory, he is drawing all to himself to form one glorious community of love, modelled on the supreme community of love of the most Blessed Trinity. Continually he is interceding for his brothers and sisters still in the pilgrimage of earth's journey. Continually he stays the hand of the Father from severely chastising men who utterly forget the law of love, and sin fearfully against one another. Continually he obtains mercy for man by offering himself as a perpetual fragrant sacrifice, while on earth countless priests are making the identical offering of him day after day to glorify the Father through the Lamb's clean oblation. From the Father he receives the supreme Gift and Promise of the Father: the Spirit, in order to pour him out on all who accept his gospel message and put it into practice in their lives. Through his Spirit he himself continues to live in the Church, guiding and leading it to its destined goal, for he promised to be with her all times even to the consummation of the world.

Today, the entire Church triumphant sings a mighty hymn of praise to him to whom they owe all that they have in the realm

above. Today the company of faithful departed lifts up their voices in joyful expectation, to share the glory that is his and which he won for them who remained faithful to him throughout life, despite the weaknesses of human frailty. Today the militant Church on earth celebrates its Savior who deigned to live a humble life here below in order to teach all mankind true and lasting values, and the only way to lasting happiness. Today all creation joins in one powerful hymn of love and thanksgiving, resounding throughout the universe: All glory to Jesus, Incarnate Son of God, Son of the Virgin Mary, our Savior, our Brother and our God. To him with the Father and the Holy Spirit be everlasting glory and honor. Amen.

### **PENTECOST SUNDAY**

**(May 29, 1977)**

The pointers given in the biblical notes of all three readings for this Sunday offer ample material for homilies.