

PASTORAL SECTION

HOMILETICS

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NOVEMBER 2nd — 23rd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Remembering The Departed

"WELCOME INTO YOUR KINGDOM OUR DEPARTED BROTHERS AND SISTERS." (*Præx Euch. II*)

Yesterday, many of you visited the cemetery. You prayed for your dear departed that God would speedily take them home to Himself if, indeed, they are not already there. As the Bible says: "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be freed from their sins." (*2 Mach. 12,46*).

The thoughts of a Christian in regard to the dead are, and must be, utterly different from the grievings of the pagans "who have no hope." We know that we will see them again, where "sorrow will be no more, nor mourning, nor grief; where God will wipe the tear from every eye," and this hope bears us up. The truth that we can help and relieve them, especially at Mass and Communion, is one of the deepest consolations of our faith. The assurance that they are, or soon will be, safe at Home, a Home that can never be broken up, and that one day we will be there with them — makes grief bearable.

Actually, our separation from them is more apparent than real. The love that united us with them in this life continues beyond the grave. We know that they are more alive than ever, that they are near us, present in that real, but unseen world which surrounds us. That is what the Communion of Saints means.

But the chief thought that makes our approach to death Christian is this — Christ's death as our representative has taken from death its worst bitterness, and His Resurrection has guaranteed ours. "Dying He destroyed our death, and rising He restored us to life." As one of the Prefaces for Sunday puts it: "By suffering on the cross, He freed us from unending death, and by rising from the dead He gave us eternal life." (*Sunday Pref. II.*) Perhaps, our funeral rites have been somewhat gloomy not the prayers so much as the sombre black color. The Council has called for a complete reform of the burial rite in order to show more clearly that a Christian's death is a going home with Christ, that we are so identified with Him as to make our death a sharing with Him. In many places, even here in the Philippines, black is usually

no longer the color of the funeral vestments, and the mourners wear clothes that show, in spite of their natural grief, a real joy that a brother or sister has gone Home, or is surely on the way there.

A suggestion — should you arrange to have Mass said for a dead relative or friend during November, or at any other time, don't ask for a Requiem Mass in black. Instead, request that the third Eucharistic Prayer be the one chosen on that day. All the Eucharistic Prayers include a commemoration of the departed, and two of them allow a special intercession mentioning the name of the deceased right there in the heart of the Mass.

Listen to this. It is from the third prayer. "Remember N....., whom you have called from this life. In baptism he (she) died with Christ: may he (she) also share His resurrection, when Christ will raise our mortal bodies and make them like His own in glory. Welcome into Your Kingdom our departed brothers and sisters, and all who have left this world in Your friendship. There we hope to share in Your glory when every tear shall be wiped away. On that day we shall see You, our God, as You are. We shall become like You and praise You forever through Christ our Lord, from Whom all good things come."

In this prayer, inserted into the Mass of the day, our dead are remembered where remembrance is best. It is prayed during that most sacred moments when Christ's death — the death that made all other deaths bearable and His Resurrection, the guarantee of ours, are being recalled and made present, and when their eternal promise is being anticipated in joyful hope.

One last point — our offering of condolence must be charged with hope. We carry Christ with us. Therefore, be Christ. Carry His message of hope into homes of mourning. Even if we say little, with a hand-clasp or a sign of heartfelt sympathy, let us say it in words of Christian hope.

"In Christ the hope of a blessed resurrection has dawned for us, the promise of future immortality overcomes any sadness at the prospect of death. For Your faithful, O Lord, life is not taken away, it is changed. The house of this earthly pilgrimage is destroyed to become an eternal Home in heaven." (*Preface of tomorrow's Masses.*)

NOVEMBER 9th — 24th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Dedication Of St. Saviour

"TODAY THIS HOUSE HAS RECEIVED SALVATION." (*Gosp.*)

One day, Jesus was entering the town of Jericho. News of His coming had brought out a large crowd which thronged the streets to see Him. One of them was Zacchaeus, a Jew, but a traitor to his nation. A collaborator with the enemy, he was one of their tax-gatherers, grown rich by preying on his own people, guilty of fraud and extortion. But,

like any other man, he was searching for some meaning in life. He wanted peace and happiness and he was not finding it in his ill-gotten wealth. So he joined the crowd pressing on to see Jesus. Being short, and no doubt ashamed to be conspicuous by going to the front, he scrambled up a tree, much like a small boy who wants to see a parade.

Never forget that nothing, not even the least event in the life of Jesus, happened by chance. He stops, so does everyone else. He looks up at Zacchaeus, He calls him by name: "Zacchaeus, come down." Feeling ridiculous, and perhaps fearing a public rebuke for his bad life, Zacchaeus slides down. Then Jesus speaks, not to condemn but to convert—to reveal what kind of a Father God is: "Zacchaeus, today I must come to your house to dine with you."

Incidents like this are not just events that occurred 1939 or so years ago. They are happening *now* especially in our lives. Let us not think of ourselves so much as living *since* Zacchaeus, but *as* Zacchaeus. Vat. II tells us: "In the Holy Scripture, the Father Who is in Heaven constantly meets His children and speaks with them." What God's word tells us about Jesus and Zacchaeus in today's Gospel is true about ourselves. Only the externals are different.

There is a lot of Zacchaeus in all of us. "If we say we have no sin, we are liars and the truth is not in us." So, when you hear or read; "At that time Jesus said to Zacchaeus. Today I must come to your home," remember what it means: At this time Jesus says to me: "Today..." He says it, now and here, to each one of us. Each one of us as a living temple is the one dwelling place. He is most interested in entering. He is urgent: "I *must* come." We must consent to let him enter our lives.

Perhaps, if we are honest, we can see ourselves likewise in the indifferent crowd: "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!" Like the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son, we resent seeing others (to whom, God help us, we feel superior), blessed by God. Maybe like those in the parable of the vineyard, we feel jealous of those who begin at the eleventh hour. If we ever forget that Christ came precisely "to save those who were lost," God help us.

Rather, let our conversion, like that of Zacchaeus, be thorough and complete. And let it take the same course as his did—in generous and constant concern for our less privileged brethen.

On Tuesday you will go to the polls. I'll not tell you whom to vote for, since of course—I've no right to do that. But, as the Council reminds us (*L.G. No. 76*), our right to vote is truly sacred, so is our duty to vote. Patriotism is a Christian virtue: "Render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar," said Our Lord. Love of our country is an extension of the love we owe our neighbor, which is a manifestation of our love of God. It does not stop there, of course, but our charity will never become worldwide if it does not start with concern for our country's welfare. So, in our choice of candidates we must consider one thing only—the overall good of our nation. If each and every citizen realized that electing our government officials is very much a religious act, then we would choose those whom before God and regardless of party lines or personal considerations, we sincerely believe will serve our nation best.

Don't say, "What's the use of voting? All politicians become corrupt anyway." To think or talk that way is to deny the Incarnation of Christ, to forget what happened to the world when God the Son left His heaven to set the world right. "The hand of the Lord is not shortened." What happened to Zacchaeus will happen to us, as individuals and as a nation, if each one of us does his part.

Pray today at Mass, as we've been praying for some months now in the Prayer of the Faithful, for honest, clean and peaceful elections. God love you.

NOVEMBER 16th — 25th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

E c u m e n i s m

**"IN MERCY AND LOVE UNITE ALL YOUR CHILDREN
WHEREVER THEY MAY BE." (Prax Euch. III.)**

The Council, in its decree for priests, insists that high among his duties is that of gathering God's family together as a brotherhood of living unity, leading all through Christ and in the Holy Spirit to God the Father. So, since the Mass we are offering is the very source of community, let's consider the unity that God wants among Christians.

Everything human began when man was created in the likeness of God's Trinity (unity in diversity), and will end when God gathers the Whole Christ, Head and members, to Himself. God made us precisely to gather us all into one intimate union with Himself, which naturally means union with one another.

Today's Gospel tells of the Church as a sort of grain of mustard seed destined to become a tree, and as a leaven intended to permeate the mass of mankind. Jesus spoke of the unity He willed for His Church, and He prayed that we be united like the living loving unity of the Adorable Trinity Itself.

For too long, this wish of Christ has been frustrated by the scandal of a divided Christendom, split up into many denominations. To say that the condition of mankind today demands that Christians show a united front, that we must get together in order to survive, is not the whole truth or the main truth—it is the will of Christ, expressed clearly, that all may be one. The same will that urges us to pray and work for the reunion of Christians—one fold under one Shepherd.

Some Protestant denominations have formed the World Council of Churches to study reunion and pray for it. (7 of these are represented in the Philippines, alongside 361 registered religious sects that are not yet affiliated, but which we hope will become so.) And then came Pope John and his Council. At his election, the Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox said: "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." In 1964, the same Patriarch met Pope Paul in Jerusalem to discuss reunion. Earlier this year the Pope spoke to the World Council of Churches,

Any study of the Council documents shows how much we must long for reunion, how sorry we must be that the break-up ever happened. There have been faults on both sides—fear and suspicion, stressing the things that divide, rather than those which unite sincere Christians.

We must clearly realize what the ultimate aim of ecumenism is—not a loose federation of Churches, but the unity in doctrine, in worship and in government for which Christ prayed. While we cannot compromise essentials, we must as followers of Christ, practise charity. We must learn to disagree without being disagreeable. It would be naive to think that reunion, will happen soon, but a start has been made, doors have been opened and God grant they will never be closed. Each of us has a responsibility here, to get nearer and nearer to Christ, and so hasten the day when He, the Source of all Unity, will make possible what, humanly speaking, seems impossible.

It will come a no surprise that when the final revision of the Mass begins on the Sunday after next, many ecumenical elements will be encountered. For instance, at the placing of the bread and wine on the altar, the formula is that of the Jewish blessing of bread and wine. This is a gesture of openness to the race from which Jesus, through Mary, sprang; the first people chosen by God, the race with whom the Old Covenant was made, and sad to confess, not always treated in the past with Christian charity.

Then after the Our Father, we will have the embolism but it will end differently: "As we await the blessed hope and return of Our Lord Jesus Christ," and then all will join in the acclamation (on the cover of the new Community Massbook): "for Yours is the Kingdom and the Glory forever." This has been used by Protestants and long before them by the Orthodox at the end of the Lord's Prayer. These words somehow got into the Bible. How? From the early Catholic liturgy of the Mass, over 1500 years ago. The addition will be a message to our separated brothers that we long for the day when we will all be one.

Thank God, we're already working together on projects for the betterment of mankind, as exemplified by the relief of the starving during the Nigerian war. And on special occasions, we hold special services of prayer together with them, begging God our common Father for unity in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

May the new form of the Mass bring about the attitude necessary for reunion.

NOVEMBER 23rd — 26th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

End Of An Era

"HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY." (Gosp.)

Today, the last day of the Church's year, marks the end of an era. It will be the last time that Sunday Mass will be celebrated in the intermediate style of the last few years. Next Sunday, the first Sun-

day of Advent, a new era begins. The Mass we've been expecting so long begins next Sunday. By a coincidence, it's exactly 400 years since the last big revision and enriching was made on the Mass-rite, back in 1570, the year before Manila was founded.

The changeable elements in worship can and must be updated with the passing of time (*Cons. Lit. 21*) not for the sake of change itself, not to return to the past just for the sake of the past; but to make sure that what is said and done is truly significant for the people of today.

The first thing you will notice about the new Mass formula next Sunday is its noble simplicity. Any celebration that takes too long to get under way tends to become boring. Hence, the Mass as of next Sunday will begin with a hymn sung by all during the entrance procession. There will be no more prayers at the foot of the Altar, no more introit, but just a joyful greeting to Christ our High Priest, the invisible Leader of the assembly. Instead of an offertory that had gradually grown into a "little canon," a much more simplified placing of the gifts on the Altar will take place.

Another feature is a certain flexibility. The Council declared that the Church has no desire to impose a rigid uniformity (*Ibid 37*). Certain choices (optional prefaces, choice among 4 eucharistic prayers, 5 possible formats for the common admission of sinfulness, etc.), are available for each celebration. The unity of the Church does not demand uniformity down to the last detail in non-essentials.

It will take some weeks before we grow used to everything in this final form of the Mass, but its outlines are easy to grasp. The Mass can be simply but accurately described as an invitation followed by a response, and its format follows these two elements.

The invitation takes place in the liturgy of the word. Christ Himself speaks to us in the readings and sermon. Next Sunday we will see how God's invitation to his family is given the importance it deserves.

Having listened to God's invitation, we are ready to respond by joining in Christ's Sacrifice. This is not so much a matter of offering Christ again to His Father — He is with His Father — it is rather that He gives us an opportunity of offering ourselves along with Him. We have been involved in His eternal response to the Father ever since our baptism, when the Holy Spirit raised us up into Christ's life and activity. This inclusion in Christ's response is intensified when he comes among us sacramentally at Mass, and invite us to seal our response by joining in the sacred meal.

After next Sunday, Mass without communion will appear strange indeed. When the nature of the Mass as a sacrificial meal is made clear, we will know that to come to Mass without eating is like accepting our Father's invitation and then refusing to eat. Communion should be the climax of our response.

If we keep these two elements, invitation and response clearly in mind, then we will see where everything fits in. *But*, and this a big "but" the whole historic event of next Sunday will somehow escape us unless we recall that the primary purpose of it all is to worship God our Father better with complete dedication and unlimited surrender. Only then shall we be able to depart from Mass intensely ready to promote, in every way, His interests in the world.

NOVEMBER 30th — 1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Meaning Of Advent

"THE TIME HAS COME, OUR SALVATION IS NEAR" — (*Reading II.*)

Since Advent begins today, it is reasonable for us to ask ourselves just what the purpose of this period is. The word Advent means a coming which naturally is the coming of Christ. But which coming? His birth in Bethlehem 1,969 years ago? No, that has happened and cannot happen again. We are not living in the Old Testament times and looking forward to the coming of Christ. We are not trying to re-live the weeks before His birthday. That would be quite unreal.

His coming that is taking place now is the advent he makes to us in His word at Mass, His Sacrifice, most particularly at the Communion time. He was already with us before Mass, and He will remain with us after Mass. This is the coming that has meaning and value for us here and now. While it is true that it began when He came in person 1970 years ago, His coming is still continuing on through the Church which is a continuation of Himself and His activity in the Sacraments.

What then do we look forward to during Advent? What we call His *second* coming, is His majesty at the consummation of the world. The first reading today, describes it in most exhilarating terms — the unity and peace that will be ours when the Lord judges the nations, giving His awards to a multitude of peoples. (*Is. 2:15*) There will be no more wars, no more misunderstandings.

In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that the last times are already under way, that we are in the new and everlasting covenant which will have its climax in Christ's coming in glory. Meanwhile, He tells us exactly what our preparation should be — unselfish love of others. The startling phrase: "He who loves his neighbor has done all that the Law demands is explained by enumerating the 10 commandments, and showing that they are all summed up in loving our neighbor as ourselves. (*Romans 13:8*). Have charity fulfill *all* the demands of the law" — (*Ibid. 10*). As an incentive to His concern for others, he

reminds us with pressing urgency of the times in which we live, that the dawn of Christ's coming in glory is at hand.

With even more insistence, Christ's own words in the Gospel reading tell us to be always ready for we do not know the day or the hour of Christ's coming. But, it is not to be in a spirit of dread or paralyzing fear. God is our Father, an ever-loving Father, and Christ whom He sent to be our Redeemer, is one of us, our Brother. No father could be pleased if his children lived in a nightmare of fear of him. Nor could an elder brother be pleased if his younger brothers and sisters thought of his return with anything but joy and eagerness. Being always terrified of God our Father and Christ our Brother is an incredible perversion of the Christian message. The response of love, (and the Scripture assure us that "perfect love casts out fear") is the response of children to a loving father or a perfect brother.

At all times we look forward to His second and final coming but particularly each year at Advent. Just listen to the Preface in today's Mass: "Father, all powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give You thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. When He humbled Himself to come among us as a man, He fulfilled the plan You formed long ago and opened for us the way to salvation. Now we watch for the day hoping that the salvation promised us will be ours when Christ our Lord will come again in His glory. (*Pref. Adv. 1*).

We stir up our hope by recalling all that God did for mankind throughout history, especially sending His Son "for us man and for our salvation." Moreover, we remember His particular goodness to us in calling us at baptism to become one with Christ and join in His work, preparing ourselves and all mankind to welcome Him now and at the end of time.

COME, LORD JESUS.
