

PASTORAL SECTION

HOMILETICS

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PENTECOST (JUNE 2)

THE FAMILY OF GOD

When Moses asked God by what name He should be called, He answered, "Yahweh," that is, He Who is always present. Before Our Saviour ascended into Heaven, He promised, "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you. Behold, I am with you all days."

When Our Lord said, "I will not leave you orphans," He promised the Church. Because the Church is Christ, an extension of Christ, a continuation of Christ. He became one of us, lived with us. More than that, He died to deliver us from eternal death, and He rose to give us His own life. He raised us up to become His brothers, members of His Father's family.

Before Christ came, God chose a special people, the Jews, to keep alive the promise of a Redeemer coming. He made an agreement with them, to last till Christ came. They became His family, His people. He spoke of them with great tenderness, as only a loving Father could: "I it was, none other, Who guided their first steps, and took them in My arms, and healed all their injuries."

When Christ came, He founded a new family. He gathered them in His Church. Faith and baptism make us members of this new family, under an agreement or covenant, which will never be changed.

In this family, God is the Father and Christ the Eldest Brother. We are the younger brothers and sisters, not by right as Christ is, but by adoption-- a very special kind of adoption, since we share God's very own life.

We were born into this family in Baptism. We began then to live in God's life and love. We grew up in it when we were confirmed. As members of the family, we have duties to one another. We continue Christ's

work—doing what we can for the welfare of the souls and bodies of our brothers in Christ. All this we do to bring Christ to others. Actually, we allow Christ in ourselves to serve Himself in the other members of His family.

We need nourishment constantly in this family of God. Our soul, like our body, needs constant food. God, our loving Father, provides this nourishment in Communion. We should use it regularly, constantly, even daily if possible, to stay perfectly healthy.

The law of annual communion is like a good parent's concern for a child with no appetite. The parent insists that the child does not leave the table till sufficient food is taken. So, God's Church thoughtfully makes a minimum for the Christian who is careless about divine nourishment. But, like a good parent who keeps pointing to the example of the healthy children who eat willingly and regularly: "Look at your brother, what a good boy he is, he eats well," God our Father wants us to be an example to our brothers and sisters. When we gather round our Father's table for the Family Meal at Mass, let our good example encourage the sluggish.

The Family of God has much greater cohesion than an ordinary family, because it is alive! Christ lives in each member and in the whole family. We each retain our individuality and our personal responsibility, but we are more closely related to one another in Christ, than the natural relationship of brothers and sisters. Our mutual sharing is also amazing—the Passion of Christ is as much ours as if we'd endured it ourselves; our patience in trials is an extension of His sufferings; our loving one another is Christ loving Himself! Any sin we commit (not just public sin that would bring shame on the whole family, but *any* sin) does harm to the whole family—a very powerful reason why we should repent immediately should we sin, and not continue to harm the family into which we have been reborn.

Today in Pentecost, the day of the inauguration of the new family of God. Loving Father, in the Name of Jesus and for the love of Jesus, Your Son and Our older Brother, send Your Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and purify our hearts, so that we may be aware of what it means to belong to Your special Family. We ask this in the Name of our Brother Jesus Who lives and rules with You in the Ecstasy of Love Who in the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY (JUNE 9)

THE CHURCH—THE MYSTICAL BODY

The Second Vatican Council recently concluded, had for its chief purpose to make known what the Church really is. At least Pope Paul VI said so, and he ought to know.

The Church is much more than what we see. We perhaps think of it as a vast intestinal company. Christ is the founder of the Company, the Pope is His representative, the Bishops are managers of branches of the Company, priests and religious executives directing the laity. The aim of the Company is to save souls. What gives the company dignity in the nobility of its aims and the dignity of its Founder.

This is a most inadequate idea of the Church. The union of Christ and His followers is far more intimate, far more wonderful, than an organization. It is an organism—a living thing. Christ and His Church form one living body.

The illustration is from St. Paul. St. Paul could never forget that day in Damascus, long after the death of the Saviour, when he heard Christ saying "Why do you persecute Me?" Not "Why do you persecute My friends, My follower?" but "Why do you persecute *Me*?" The question implied that there was between Christ and His followers a most intimate union, an actual identity, in fact. What Paul did to Christ's followers, he did to Christ.

This became clearer to Paul later when he heard of Our Lord's words: "Whatever you do to one of these My least brethren, you do it to Me." This intimate union between Christ and His followers, St. Paul compared to the unity of a body.

Our human body is made up of various members, each doing its own function. Each member shares in the life of the whole body, each work work for the good of the whole body. The union of Christ and Christians is like that. Christ is like the head, his followers are like the members of His Body. As long as the member remain united to the Head, it shares in the vigor, health, strength and life of Christ. But if a man turns away from Christ, if he cut himself off from Christ, then he is like a hand or a foot cut off from the source of life—the whole body. Christ and His Church are one.

Our Lord's illustration was from a fruit-tree. We know that the sap of life flows through the trunk of a tree to the branches, enabling them to bear leaves and fruit. A branch can be grafted on to the tree and become part of it, sharing its life. If we cut off a branch, it will wither and die. Our Lord said the Church is like this. He is the trunk. We were grafted on to Him at Baptism. As long as we stay united to Him, we're spiritually alive and fruitful. This is another illustration of our close union with Christ through His Church.

Today we honour the Adorable Trinity. We recall how God the Father created us in love. Since it happened that we were born into the family of Adam, we shared in the poverty of that family, a poverty the founder

of that family had brought on himself and us by his sin. God the Father sent His Son, the New Adam, to found a New Family, the family begun by Christ. We were reborn into this family, we were grafted on to Christ, we were in some way identified with Christ, when we were baptized. We're now on our way back to our Father, united with the Son, in a union brought about by the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity should mean exactly this for us and not just heavenly mathematics. Our situation is that we came from the Father. We're on a pilgrimage back to Him, united with His Son Who became one of us, and made us sons in Himself, by the action of the Holy Spirit. We, God's *oioke*, gather at the invitation of our Father to join His Son and our Brother, in offering the Mass. This gathering, this being assembled into a miniature of the Universal Church, is brought about by the Holy Spirit. He is the soul, the life-giving principle of the assembly we form, with Christ, and in His Name, when we come together to offer Mass.

We all know how on big occasions like a birthday, the members of an office or firm will have a party. Never do they feel greater unity than on such an occasion, when they are all joined together in a Common celebration. We today, rich and poor, are gathered, as members of Christ, with our Head, to honour His Father and ours, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We should really feel this unity. We should really experience it. It will draw us closer to Christ our Elder Brother and to one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

CORPUS CHRISTI (JUNE 13)

THE EUCHARIST, GUARANTEE OF THE RESURRECTION

The Mass is the sum and the centre of Christian life. It is the focus to which everything leads, and the source from which everything flows. So, nothing is more important for us than to offer the Mass with faith.

How we priests long for the day when what we say to God the Father at Mass will be completely true of all our brothers around the Altar: "You know their faithfulness," we say, "and their attachment to you." This faithfulness means much more than just believing in truths God has taught us. Faith means total dedication to the Person. It means a complete surrender of ourselves, and a complete giving of ourselves to God in Christ. The highest act of faith is martyrdom. We don't think of it, and the martyrs did not think of it, just as an act of belief he made with his mind, but rather as something he did with his whole person. When in the marriage ceremony, a Christian man and woman promise each other faithfulness, they mean much more than

consenting in their minds to truths about marriage. They mean giving themselves completely to each other and to their unborn children till death. Let us make our Mass an act of faith—a complete giving of ourselves, all we do, all we suffer, along with Christ, to our Father.

Hope must also come into our offering of Mass—very much so. If we only realized it, the purpose of every Mass is to give us confidence. Our Saviour, promising us the Eucharist, told us it is the guarantee of our living forever. He went so far as to warn and threaten those who neglected the Eucharist that they would not have the Life He came to give. It is the very source of that Life, it is the pledge of our being raised up on the Last Day to live forever. Not only does the Mass recall the Redeeming Acts of Christ, not only does it make them present and effective here and now, but its power extends to the future.

So much is hope a part of the Mass that we, God's people gathered at His table, go through play-acting as though our salvation was already achieved, as though we were already in heaven. For instance, at the Sanctus, we are praising and thanking God Who saved us, without our in any way deserving it, as we will do eternally in God's Home.

Then at the Communion-time, our coming to the Banquet prepared for us by God the Father is an acting out of the joy of Heaven, compared in next Sunday's Gospel.

If we regarded each Mass as a further stopping place on our journey back to our Father, a journey under the leadership of Christ our Brother in the unity created by the Holy Spirit, then we would get the courage needed to spur us on to continue our pilgrimage from one Mass till the next.

A hundred years ago, there was a fierce persecution of Christians in what is now called Viet-Nam. Thousand were put to death. When some martyrs showed special courage, the judges would say in wonder: "He has been eating the enchanted bread that casts a spell on the soul." Centuries before, martyrs in Abilene said, "We cannot live without the Mass. It is the Mass that makes Christians."

Every time the Blessed Mother joined the gatherings of the first Christians at Mass, she saw recalled and made present the saving Act of her Son, as today's Epistle describes. She also saw the guarantee of future glory proclaimed. May ours be faith and hope like hers, at Mass, and during all the time between one Mass and the next.

THE CHURCH— THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

We know that God our Father sent His Son to become one of us, to redeem us, and to earn for us the right to live with God's own life. "I am come," said Christ our Brother, "that they may have life and have it more abundantly." This life is a sharing in God's own life, a life that lifts us above the natural level, makes us children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ. This life we can obtain only through Christ: "None comes to the Father except through Me." So, somehow, we have to make contact with Christ, and get the life He obtained for us.

Obviously, we cannot see Christ with our eyes, or touch Him with our hands as the Apostles did or the thief on the Cross. But, He still lives on in the Church. It is a continuation of Himself, it is, in a mysterious way, His very own self. Our whole religion centres on Jesus Christ. We, of this day and age, contact Him in His Church.

Jesus Christ came on earth to do three great works. He came to make His Father known—He is the "visible image of the invisible God: "He who sees Me," He said, "sees the Father." He came to restore to us the Divine Life that Adam lost by his sin. "I have come that may have life." He came to show us, by His teaching and His example, how to live as children of God: "Learn of Me." All this He summed up when He said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

The Way. Do you want to know surely the way to God our Father. You find it in the Church. Christ Who said, "I am the way; no one comes to the Father except by Me," has left the Church to continue His work. The Church is Himself. We have absolute security that in the Church we have available official contact with Christ, Who is the one and only Way to God. The Church preserves the situation that existed when Christ was on earth.

The Truth. The Church is Christ, therefore the Church has the truth. As the Scriptures say: "The house of God, which is the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and ground of truth." We want the truth about the problems that oppress our hearts—we want to know about life after death—the Church has the answer, because the Church is Christ and He is the Truth. We have no need to envy those who could learn their religion by listening to the sermons and lessons from Jesus' own lips—in the Church we have exactly the same teaching continued. He Himself said so: "He who hears you, hears Me." "I thank God," says St. Paul, "that you received my preaching for what it is, the very words of God Himself." On the modern issues that distress the men of today—on warfare, on marriage, on family life—sincere men

are looking to right and left for the answer; sad to say, some of them fail to look to Christ, living on in His Church. The Church has remained steadfast to His teaching—He promised to be with the Church all days—the Church can and will help us find an answer, a sure answer, for Christ is the Truth and the Church is Christ.

The Life. How often Jesus Christ talked about Himself as a source of life. "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me, even though he be dead, shall live, and everyone who believes in Me shall never die." "I am the living Bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he will live forever, and the bread that I will give is My Flesh for the life of the world."

The life He talked about so much is obviously not our ordinary life which begins when we were born and ends when we die. If it were, He would have said something like this: "He who has sufficient food, rest and medicine and avoids accidents shall live." Instead of that He said, "He who will enter into life must keep the Commandments—love God, love your neighbour." This life is worth making any sacrifice to get—it is precious and important that He said it is worth dying to get or keep.

He is the Life and the Church is Himself—we contact Him and obtain this life through the Church, chiefly through the Sacraments. We received this Divine Life when we were born into His family at Baptism; it matured at our Confirmation. If we cut ourselves off from Christ, the source of this life, we are like a cut-off member of the body, destined only to death and corruption. We can be reingrafted by genuine repentance, and seal that in the Sacrament of restoration—Confession. The greatest of all the Sacraments--the Eucharist--is the wonderful nourishment of this Divine Life.

So, don't think of the Church as just an organization connected with Christ only by the historical fact that He started it. Rather it is a living Church, it is Christ living in the world today. The Church, through its life-giving Sacraments, brings us to Him and Him to us. Especially the Eucharist, which highlights our unity with Christ, and one with another in Christ.

Frederic Ozanam, founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which has done so much social work, wrote in his last Will: "I die in the Catholic Church. I have known the doubts of the present age, but all my life has convinced me that there is no rest for the mind and heart, except in the Church."

Loving Father, make us Your children realize that the Church is Christ. We ask this in His Name. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (JUNE 23)

OUR DIGNITY AS THE SONS OF GOD

Maybe your reaction to these words is: Can this be really true? Are we really called to glory? Perhaps we feel like the Apostles during the storm on the sea of Galilee. They felt frustrated—it was at Our Lord's command that they had set out, it was for Him they were exhausting themselves trying to save the ship; yet He seemed to be asleep, not concerned. But then Our Lord awoke. He rebuked them: "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" Then He commanded the wind and the waves. "And there came a great calm."

The world today is surely full of turmoil. We see wars and their horrible effects—so many killed and wounded, homes destroyed, survivors living in misery. Then the appalling increase in crime—every day we read in the papers or hear in the news so many accounts of atrocious crimes that it hardly even shocks us any more. Add to this the desperate poverty of so many, often caused by callous inhuman indifference to the rights of others. What we see all this human misery, we perhaps wonder: "Is God asleep?" Is He really concerned about us?

This is a temptation of the devil described in today's Epistle as going round like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He'll tell us: "God has no regard for the good. He is not looking. Life has no purpose, in meaning. Drift along, eat, drink, enjoy yourself, tomorrow you'll die."

Let us, as the first Pope told us in today's Epistle, resist the devil, strong in faith. Faith in Christ Who said: "Have confidence, I have overcome the world."

For us who have been united with Church, who, since Christ has made us His brothers, are in God's sight joined to Christ, life has meaning, life has value, life is worthwhile. As Christians we have a dignity that no one can take from us. There is no need to despair; no matter what disasters happen in the world. Rather, there is every reason for confidence, unbounded confidence.

God has a personal love for each one of us. Even the hairs of our head are numbered. He created us to share His love and life, and to live forever in His Home after this short time of trial. We can say to our Creator: "Do not despise the work of Your hands." He made us out of love.

Then He is our Father. Our Saviour taught us: "Thus shall you pray: Our Father." And St. Paul reminds us: "We have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry, Abba." This word 'Abba' is translated

'Father,' but a better translation would be 'Daddy,' the word used by a trusting child, calling on its father in intimacy and loving confidence.

Not only is He our father, He is to be our Rewarder. The victory has already been won by Christ, we have only to keep with Christ, stay loyal to Christ, and victory is ours. "I am your reward," says God, "your reward exceeding great."

Last Friday we honoured the Heart of Our Saviour. What is that Heart? It is the heart of a Friend, the best, the most faithful Friend there could be. "I will not call you servants," He says to us, "but I have called you friends, because all things I have heard from My Father, I have made known to you." "He who has found a faithful friend has found a treasure," says God. To think that Christ is our Friend, Our changeless Friend!

Besides, He is our Brother. He first became our Brother 1969 years ago at the moment of His becoming a man, sharing our natural life. And 33 years later, at His Resurrection, He became doubly our Brother, raising us up to His Divine Life. First born of many brethren, our Eldest Brother, He shares His life and His right to inheritance with us.

When we think of Him as our Saviour, despair becomes impossible. "Fear not," He says, "for I have redeemed thee." St. Paul has a question for the unduly afraid: "Who is he that shall condemn? Christ Jesus Who died, Who has also risen again, Who is at the right hand of God, Who also makes intercession for us." Today's Gospel shows us Christ as the Good Shepherd, Who gave His life for us His sheep.

Sure, our being children of God does not exempt us from suffering on earth. "The disciple is not above his Master." Let's go back to St. Peter's message to us today: "God, the God of grace," he reminds us, "after you have suffered a little, will Himself perfect you and confirm you and establish you."

Thursday is the Feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Ask her to make us trusting, confident, hopeful, as children of God should be.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (JUNE 30)

CHRIST GIVES US THE SACRAMENTS

Once, during the life-time of Jesus Christ, He cured a paralytic. It was not by any means the most spectacular miracle He did, but it resulted in an enthusiasm no other miracle seems to have caused. Since the men who carried the sick man (maybe his own sons) could not enter the house where

Jesus was because of the crowd, they removed part of the roof and let him down that way. And seeing their faith, Jesus said: "Be of good heart, son, your sins are forgiven." When His enemies doubted His power to do this, He made it clear by a miracle that they could see that the other wonder, the forgiveness of the man's sins, had indeed happened, even if they saw no outward change. "Which is easier," He asked, "to say, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Arise, take up your bed and walk?" And there and then He cured the paralytic and sent him home carrying his bed. "And the people went home thanking God Who gave such power to men." St. Luke records their words: "We have seen wonderful things today."

Through His death Christ redeemed us, and through His Resurrection He won for us the wonderful life that make us children of God. This life He wants to share with us as a tree shares life with its branches, as a body is vitalized and directed by its head. This is why He came on earth, this is why He founded His Church—to share with us His Divine Life. He did not come just to preach a few sermons, to tell us to be kind, honest and pure. He did not come just to heal a few sick. He did not come to free us from sorrow and pain. "I have come that they may have life."

Quite obviously this is a special kind of life, over and above our natural life. If He were talking about natural life, He'd have told us not to eat or drink or smoke to excess, to keep the traffic rules, to have regular medical check-ups. No, He spoke of a supernatural life, a life far more precious than our natural life, a life worth even losing our natural life for.

He's still with the Church, He still gives this life. How? Through the seven great signs or sacraments through which we contact Him and by which He gives this life. These sacraments play a vital role in our lives. They are the normal means by which the life of Christ is brought to us.

What is a sacrament? It is a sign or ceremony we can see, which God uses to give life to our souls. We are quite used to signs and ceremonies. A graduation ceremony—a sign a student has completed a stage in schooling; an oath-taking ceremony on assuming office—these tell us something is happening. But the signs and ceremonies we call the sacraments don't just tell us something, they actually do what they tell us.

Each sacrament is a work of Christ. It is Christ Who speaks through the priest when he says over the bread and wine at Mass: This is My Body, This is My Blood. It is Christ who speaks when a priest says, "I absolve you from your sins." St. Augustine says, "When Peter baptises, Christ baptises; when John baptises, Christ baptises; when Judas baptises, Christ baptises." The power of the Sacraments always comes from the risen Christ living on in the Church, and acting through His ministers.

Each Sacrament is a sign of faith. Yesterday, the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the year of faith, the 18th centenary of the martyrdom of these saints of faith ended. We need faith to see that water poured over someone's head actually makes that person a child of God and gives Divine Life. You need faith to see that a bishop touching and anointing a person's head makes him or her a mature Christian, that Christ is really in the Eucharist, and so on.

Faith is also important for the full effect of a Sacrament. The ceremony does not work like magic. How much each receives depends on his dispositions—his faith, his love, his desire to share the attitude of Christ. He is always ready to give the life He won for us, but He won't force it on us—He gives only to those who are ready to receive it.

We must not regard the Sacraments as spiritual gas-stations where we fill up our spiritual tanks to keep us going along the road to Heaven. They do provide us with help towards Heaven, but the main reason for receiving them is to help us grow in our likeness to Christ, our identification with Him, to increase our share in the Divine Life.

The comfort, the assurance the Sacraments give us is wonderful. We see the sacred sign or ceremony—we know that the Divine Life is given or increased, if only there is faith and good will. Thank God that we belong to the Church and that the life-giving Sacraments are at our disposal, and show our gratitude by using them with intense faith, frequently and fervently.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (JULY 7)

BAPTISM MAKES US HIS SUBJECTS

The kingdom of God is a most revolutionary doctrine. It gives us a new sense of our own dignity and a new fund of courage. It brings God down into a most intimate association with us. It lifts us into an almost frightening closeness to God. Drawn together into the kingdom of God, the whole human race becomes one family. Injustice and crime must either reject this truth or cease to exist—they cannot flourish unless they waive aside the doctrine of kingdom.

In the beginning, God adopted man as His son. He gave His first people the capacity of knowing, loving and possessing God. All this was utterly beyond man's natural powers. So God, adopting man as a son, gave him a share of His Divine life, a share to which he had no rights nor claims.

Adam was created free. He could reject the supreme gift of God—the share in God's own life. He did just this—did it with terrible efficiency. He decided he would not be a son, he wanted to be an equal of God. He de-

deliberately tossed back the right to inherit everlasting life. At that moment, the divine life in man ceased.

So all of us, his descendants, were born dead, dead to the only life worthwhile. We could move, act, live with a natural life, but as for living God's life, we were dead, hopelessly, utterly dead. A mother, looking at her child born dead is a heartrending sight. That's exactly how we look to God till we have been baptized.

Never could we see God face to face. And there was nothing we could do about it. We could not restore the divine life, could do nothing to win back our inheritance. It was then that God our Father did a startling, an incredible thing. He decided to send His own Divine Son to become one of us, one of the race that had rejected its Father and King. Being God as well as man, He could do actions of infinite worth, infinitely pleasing to God. As one of us, as our substitute, He lived and died in complete obedience and made up perfectly for our disobedience. Being raised from the dead, He gave us a new and tremendous dignity. We could be re-adopted as God's sons with all the rights of sons. As St. Peter tells us in today's Epistle: It is a blessing you have been called to inherit.

We are one with Christ, called to inherit the kingdom with Him, with a unity that began when He became our substitute, our brother. Through Him, our Head, the divine life flows down to us, His members, His subjects in the kingdom. Remember He is the Head and are the members in his single real, but mysterious Body. Through Him our Head, His life comes down to us. His life is divine, the life we share with Him is divine also. God the Father, looking on us, sees us so united with His Son that we're identified with Him in God's sight. No father, looking at his son, says: "I love his head but I hate the rest of him." God loves His Son, He likewise loves us as long as we choose to stay united with Him, to be one with Him.

This is our marvelous vocation, the blessing we are called to inherit. How did it happen? How did we, who were not born united to Christ, become one with Him? By baptism. Our Lord insisted on baptism repeatedly: it was one of the last and most important things He taught. By baptism, we died to the sinfulness of Adam and were born again, rose to a newness of life, to Christ's risen life, inheritors of the kingdom of God. The outpouring of water and the Holy Spirit at baptism united us to Christ.

If the head dies, the whole body dies. When He died 1900 years ago, I died to sin; when He rose, I rose. Baptism makes that death and resurrection actual for me. As long as I am separated from Christ my Head, my actions are as meaningless as the twitchings of a body that has had its head cut off. To keep my baptism, to keep alive with the life we then received, is what we pray for in this Mass: 'One thing I have sought of the Lord, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

A Chinese who had been a follower of Confucius, then a Buddhist and is now a Christian says: "Suppose a man falls into a deep pit and cannot get out. Confucius would fold his arms and say 'Serves you right for falling in'. Buddha would offer advice about getting out, but Christ would step down and lift him out. He not only tells us what to do, but makes us able to do it through the divine life which He shares with us."

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (JULY 14)

WE ARE THE TEMPLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

To fully understand today's Epistle, we must recall how Baptism was conferred in the early Church. A candidate for Baptism (let's call him Julio) stood at the far side of a baptismal pool, ready to act out the death resurrection of Jesus Christ. He went down into the pool, the water was splashed over his head by a priest, signifying the death and burial of Jesus. Then, rising out of the pool on the other side, re-enacted the resurrection of Christ. Only this was no mere play-acting. This was a very special kind of sign-making. This was a sacrament. What was signified actually happened. Julio had gone down into that pool with a merely natural life. Now, coming out of the water, like Christ rising out from the dead, he entered into the new life of the risen Lord. As of now, he could say with St. Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me."

The implications of this cry of victory are enormous. It is really a battle-cry of limitless courage. No enemy can possibly frighten me—neither man nor devil. No temptation can overcome me, not while Christ lives in me! Our lives are buried with Christ in God. His divine life pulsates in my soul and in my body. We sometimes forget this. It was not just to save our souls that God became man. It was to save us whole and entire, body and soul. The reverence we ought to have for our bodies comes from the fact that they are members of Christ. "Do you not know," St. Paul asks us, "that your bodies are the members of Christ?" For a Christian to fail in reverence for his body is a kind of sacrilege, and it drew from St. Paul the cry: "God forbid!"

The body as well as the soul is truly, but in a way we cannot fully understand, united with Christ. Christ took a body like ours—it's a body like ours that sits glorious at the right hand of God, and when He comes back to lead us home to the Father, our body will rise from the dead to be rewarded forever along with our soul—and only then will the ecstasy of heaven be complete.

The association of our body with the risen Christ is most close, The body of a Christian, united with Christ in Baptism, nourished in the Eucharist, has become far more sacred than the chalice which holds the Blood of Christ at mass. The chalice is blessed, yes, but it's still metal; whereas our body had been united with the very Body of the risen Christ. "Do you not know that your members are the temples of the Holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom you have from God? You are not your own. You are bought with a great price . Glorify and bear God in your body."

If a Christian fails in reverence for his own body or that of another, it means he has forgotten his connection with Christ, and has rejected His strength. Only let us realize who lives in us, and we will experience His power. Once we feel the divine life pouring its powerful current through our body and soul, we will face temptation unafraid. The deeper our realization of the meaning of Christ living in our bodies, the deeper will grow our self-respect, our reverence for our own body, our respect for the bodies and souls of others, where God lives as in a temple.

Christ said: "If any man loves Me, My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our abode with him." The Jews had a deep reverence for the Ark of the Covenant and the place where the Ark was kept --the Temple. Good Christians have a deep reverence for our churches where Mass is offered and our Lord remains sacramentally. Any sacrilegious act against a church, above all against a tabernacle, fills us with horror. Greater still should be our horror of any failing in reverence for our own body or for the body of another, because the body of a baptized person is more really a dwelling place of God than the Jewish temple or a Christian church.

When the Saviour foretold His Resurrection, He referred to His Body as a temple: "What sign of authority do you give that you do these things?" "Destroy this temple," He said, "and in three days I will raise it up." May the Risen Saviour help you and me to realize that our body is important, is sacred, is the chosen dwelling place of God.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (JULY 21)

WE BECOME ADULT CHRISTIANS BY CONFIRMATION

Each year the Bishop comes to our Parish Church, the benches are re-arranged, the doors closed, and the Sacrament of Confirmation administered. Perhaps this is the only time that we think about this Sacrament. Yet it is a rounding-off, a completion of our initiation as Christians. It is the process of growing up, of becoming mature Christians, strong and adult.

Being born and growing up are quite distinct facets of life. We all know this. We also know that there is a close connection between our birth and our growing up. We can't grow up until we've been born. Our having been born is in some way frustrated unless we grow, physically and mentally. We were born in order to grow and in our growth our birth is completed. In the same way, Christians are baptized in order to be confirmed. Confirmation is the completion of Baptism.

We were born spiritually in Baptism. We began to live with a new divine life, the life of the Risen Saviour. But we were infants, and like infants our spiritual life was largely self-centered. If a person has never been confirmed (or never realized the full implications of confirmation), his attitude is something like this: "I have only one soul to save, and only one chance to save it—if I'm saved, I made a complete success of life; and if I'm lost, I'm a total failure; it would be better if I had never been born." While quite concerned about his own salvation, he does not fully realize that no one goes to heaven alone, just as no one ever went to hell alone. Of course, no one can be completely self-centered, not if he realized that baptism united us with Christ and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. But, it is true that our spiritual life tends to revolve around our self until we've been confirmed, or come to realize what confirmation means.

Confirmation is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to deepen and strengthen our faith, to make it strong enough not just for our own needs, but for the needs of others. As a child becomes an adult, he begins to see, progressively more and more, his place in the family, and in the whole community. In the same way the confirmed Christian begins to see (or ought to) his responsibility to Christ for his neighbor. He becomes deeply concerned (or ought to) for the welfare of Christ-in-the-world, which is the church—and the welfare of Christ-in-his-neighbor.

During His lifetime our Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit. "It is expedient for you that I go," He said, "for if I do not go, He cannot come. But, if I go I will send Him to you." Until He had risen, the Holy Spirit could not be given. "The Holy Spirit was not yet given," says St. John, "because He was not yet glorified." At Pentecost, He was sent, the Paraclete, the Giver of strengthening life, the Source of courage.

That is what the Holy Spirit gives the confirmed, the courage in the various situations of life. Like the courage that comes with adulthood to take away childish fears. A father is thrilled at the first faltering steps of his baby, but nothing less than a manly walk in a grown son will please any father. God, our Father, expects us to utilize the grace of our confirmation and live as adult Christians. The Christian doctor, for example, asked to murder an innocent unborn child is expected as a confirmed Christian

to say: "You've come to the wrong shop." The businessman or politician offered a fast buck in a shady deal, is expected as a confirmed Christian to say: "No dice. Nothing doing." The employee, told: "It's the boss's birthday and we're going to a burlesque. Everyone's in this," as a confirmed Christian answers: "Count me out, boys." Parents, hearing the screaming propaganda for family limitation by any, even sinful means, are expected by God to use the courage they get from Confirmation and say: "We're not interested."

We've heard of spiritual communion, when unable to receive actual communion, we desire to have Christ seal in a special way the union that is perpetual. How many of us ever think of spiritual confirmation, of asking the Holy Spirit to make us more aware of, and more responsive to, His special presence in us that began when we were confirmed? It's very easy, no special formula is needed, a little prayer like: "Come, Holy Spirit," said from the heart, will stir up the grace of our Confirmation, give us the courage of the martyrs, past and present, who cheerfully go to their death out of love for Christ. At least, we will live as mature Christians, people of strength and adult courage, and show others, by the shining example of our lives, what it means to be grown-up children of God.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (JULY 28)

CONFIRMATION—SACRAMENT OF THE APOSTOLATE

We were born to God in baptism, we achieved adulthood in God when the Holy Spirit came on us in confirmation. It doesn't matter how young we were physically—most of us in the Philippines were confirmed as babies. It doesn't make any difference if we were confirmed immediately after our baptism. Regardless of age, once we are confirmed, we're adults in the faith, strong and mature Christians.

Compare the attitude of the apostles before and after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Before Pentecost, they were weak cowardly men, who locked themselves in the Upper Room out of fear. But afterwards, what a contrast! Out they went, fearless and bold, before the crowd; with tremendous courage they announced the good news of salvation; with unbelievable zeal they were ready to make any sacrifice, any effort to bring souls to God.

Before our confirmation, we were sons indeed, but inclined to regard our faith as something to be kept to ourselves, something for our own private enjoyment. We would of course never say: "As long as I am saved myself, I don't care what happens to anyone else"—we did realize the faith was a treasure to be shared. But, the full desire to hand on the faith to others comes from our confirmation.

It would be a tragedy if our religion were like a wooden leg—something without life or warmth, that had to be strapped on every so often. If we are careful indeed to pray, hear mass, nourish our own soul, try to keep the commandments but not at all concerned about the salvation of others, we are just not fully adult, we do not fully realize what being confirmed means, we've not corresponded to the grace of our confirmation. If we are still selfish, and taking no active interest, or very little active interest in the spiritual welfare of others, we should call on the Holy Spirit Whom we received in confirmation, to help us correspond with what that Sacrament involves. Let's be generous with God. Let's open the gate to release the graces of confirmation.

Our love for Christ must overflow into zeal like His for the souls He loves, and from whom He is waiting for a return of love. Our endurance is the only limit to what we can do for the salvation of others. Charity, they say, begins at home. Have we right in our own home, someone who does not love God, perhaps a father or mother, a husband or wife, a brother or a sister, a child, a helper?

Pray for them—that's more important than anything else. Beg God to enliven the grace they received at baptism and confirmation—to bring it back to life. Do all in your power to persuade them to pray, to return to the practice of Christian living.

Today's disorder is too deeply rooted for priests alone to cure it. Indeed priests cannot cure from outside what needs curing from within—the wrong attitudes in places of work, study, entertainment—the places where lay people are and can convert and cure from the inside. The Vatican Council calls most emphatically for all of us, priests and people, to turn loose the power and the grace of our confirmation, the sacrament of the apostolate.

Don't say: What can I do? Don't hope for a miracle to save the world. There will be no miracle unless I am a part of it. Even you children, you may not be listened to if you tell your parents to love God, but you can give them good example. A little girl, only seven years old, became very ill. A doctor told her parents that an operation might make her well again. Came the time for the operation. The doctor said: "Don't be afraid. We'll just put you to sleep for a while." The child answered: "If you'll put me to sleep, I'll pray first. I always pray before I sleep." They let her kneel right there on the operating table, she prayed, and then they put her to sleep. The operation was not a success. The next day the doctor visited the little girl. "You did something for me yesterday," he said. "In one way the operation was a big success. When you said yesterday that you always pray before you sleep, you reminded me of the promise I made to God long ago. And last night, before I slept, I prayed—for the first time in twenty-five years.

Yes, we who have been confirmed have a job to do. Don't let our talent lie dormant, don't leave our grace, the grace of confirmation, unused.