

## A Humble Church Is Like Its Lord

(Following is a translation of the Italian talk on "the humble Church" given by Pope Paul VI at his weekly general audience of Aug. 10, 1966.)

Beloved sons and daughters, seeing ourselves surrounded as at this moment by many unknown faces, thinking that many of the persons present meet us for the first time and know of this central See of the Church only the picture of this audience, and recalling how easy it is for a transient visitor, a hurried tourist or a hasty observer to judge by curious and often insignificant details the entire ecclesiastical world, its mission, its morality and its religion, a desire arises in our heart as to the good, edifying and happy nature of the impression which this meeting will leave in the hearts of our visitors.

**WHAT IMAGE**, what concept of the Church and of the Pope will they remember about this moment?

What judgment, what attitude, spiritual or practical, will they have regarding Catholic Rome?

If afterward we think that the historical visage, the human aspect and the external face of the Roman Church, show evidence of many defects, inconsistencies and weaknesses, we then ask ourselves: Will esteem and empathy toward the Church itself have increased or, on the contrary, lessened in these persons? Will their faith have been strengthened or, on the contrary, shaken?

And if we think of the many criticisms, suspicions and prejudices — not excluding, often, that of the good and the wise — has in regard to our apostolic office and to the Church, we ask ourselves if the welcome, so simple and brief, which we extend to those who come here may not be more apt to arouse in them feelings of disfavor and of weariness than feeling of empathy and assent.

True, beloved children, that the acclamations and signs of affection and devotion which you greet us assure us of the goodness of your intentions and of the faithfulness of your hearts.

Nevertheless, we do not want to omit discussing for a moment the supposition that your impression of this audience and, generally, of the experience which you may have of the life of the Church might be negative. Would it not happen to everyone to have unhappy impressions of the Church?

What, therefore, shall we say to you? In some previous audiences we reviewed the glorious names — that characterize the Church: the Kingdom of God and the City of God, the House of God, Fold and Flock of Christ, Spouse of Christ, and so forth.

We likewise named some of the aspects under which the activity of the Church is presented: a praying Church, a missionary and militant Church, a poor and suffering Church, and so forth.

We will now say to you that there is another aspect of the Church in this world, that of the humble Church, that of the Church that knows its human

limitations, its own failings, its own need of God's mercy and the forgiveness of men.

Yes, this is also a penitent Church, one which preaches and practices penitence; one which does not hide its own failings but deplores them; one which willingly identifies itself with a sinning humanity in order that from a consciousness of a common misery the Church might draw a deeper sorrow for sin, a more urgent plea for divine mercy and a more humble trust in the salvation for which men hope.

The Church is humble not only in the rank and file of the faithful, but also and above all in the highest ranks of the hierarchy, which in the realization and exercise of its life-giving and moderating powers on behalf of the people of God knows that it must use them for the edification and service of souls. This is true at the highest level, that of Peter, who defines himself as the "Servant of God" and who feels more than anyone else the disproportion between the mission he has received from Christ and his own weakness and unworthiness, always recalling the exclamation of the Apostle fisherman: "Exit a me, quia homo peccator sum, Domine" (Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinner) (Luke, 5, 8).

And here we have a singular and stupendous fact, the fact of the holiness and indefectibility of the Church and of Christ's representation in it, even when churchmen are personally deficient. The Church of Peter enjoys an assistance from Christ and a presence of the Holy Spirit which makes it impossible for the powers of evil to prevail (cf. Matt. 16, 18). Indeed, the Church in its entirety does not cease to be loved by Christ even in the most perilous moments of its human fragility, nor does it lose at those times its instrumental holiness in the exercise of its pastoral functions, but remains always capable of exercising charity and salvation "for the building up of the Body of Christ" (Eph. 4, 12).

This observation, which would take us to the delicate study of God's action in His Church, authorizes us to make to you, beloved sons and daughters, a two-fold recommendation:

**Endeavor to know the Church well, to know it better.** This is the first recommendation.

Do not be satisfied with superficial impressions; do not judge the Church only by its human face and the external garments it wears. Come to know it in the variety, richness and profundity of its many aspects, in the human-divine mystery of its interior being and in the holiness and necessity of its mission of salvation.

And, in the second place, though you may even come across deficiencies and evils in the Church, do not allow them to extinguish, but rather to enkindle your love for the Church even more.

We will repeat the words of Jesus: "Blessed is he who is not scandalized in me" (Matt. 11, 6), but who instead gives ever greater fidelity, testimony and service to the Church the greater are the needs which it manifests.



Pope Paul and Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury pray together in precedent-setting rite in Rome

## Charity, Test of True Faith

(Following is a translation of an address in Italian by Pope Paul VI on Oct. 22, 1966, to the national congress of the Society of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Rome, in which he said that the history of the Church is summed up in the exercise of Christian charity.)

Beloved daughters, your presence here affords us deep consolation and we are very grateful to you for it. We also thank you for your filial, delicate thought in wanting the work of the third congress of your well-deserving and always beloved Society of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul to include in its program this visit with the Common Father, to receive from him a word of encouragement and the blessing in the name itself of Christ.

It is our duty to grant to you this word and blessing, because you deserve it for different reasons: for your charitable favor which represents the emblem of your institution and the program of your life; for the solicitude that spurs you not to be content with the common Christian profession and to donate your time and means, in fact, all of yourselves, to the care of the poor.

You deserve it, furthermore, for the time-honored faithfulness to the directives of the Church which characterizes your society and which, in so doing, gives recognition to one of the genuine characteristics of the spirituality of St. Vincent and of his religious family. Such faithfulness takes its character today from the declared intention — which has

prompted you and which is to animate all of your congress — to follow the teachings of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, to examine carefully the urgency and the universality of charitable activity.

This is the subject which moves your convention, and we want at once to express to you our pleasure for your significant choice.

In fact, no problem of greater necessity and urgency could have been proposed in the impassioned demand which today stirs all Catholic organizations to think back to their own origins, to review their own plans, to renew aims for generous action, drawing the motive for it from the updating called for by the council and stressing once more the obligation deriving from the grave tasks entrusted by the council to all the children of the Church.

This, therefore, is a necessary and urgent subject, but one that is equally beautiful and encouraging and perhaps more suitable than any other to make understood the anxiety that today stirs the Church in bringing the answer of truth and the aid of love to mankind.

It is a movement that descends to man, but one that draws its origin from the impulse given by God Himself when, in Christ Man and God, He bent toward humanity, to unite it to Himself and to restore to it its lost dignity. Charity! Everything in the Church is charity: because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son

(John 3, 16) for the salvation of the world. This charity, appeared in the Grotto of Bethlehem and which blazed on the Cross, has since then flared high and mightily, and has changed the world.

The history of the Church is summed up in this word; furthermore, the anxiety which moved the Council Fathers in their gigantic work of study and application was none other than charity: a lofty, selfless, shining love, invincible over and above all misunderstandings and distrusts, filled with warmth and empathy for mankind. In special manner for those who suffer, for the poor, the unemployed, the aged, the exiled, immigrants, the sick and those who are starving, throughout the entire gamut which today displays the sorrowful picture of a humanity that lies in need.

At the last public session on Dec. 7 of 1965, we wanted to point this out in that shining assembly, as though to offer the symbolic and conclusive image of the Council work, when we said:

"We wish rather to note how the religion of our Council has chiefly been that of charity. No one could accuse it of irreligiosity or of lack of faith in the Gospel because of such principal orientation, when we recall that it was Christ Himself who taught us that the distinctive character of His disciples is love of fellowmen (cf. John 13, 35), and when we let resound in our souls the apostolic words:

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## The Church, Like its Lord, a Source of Holiness

Following is a translation of an address given in Italian by Pope Paul VI at a general audience in St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 19, 1966.)

Beloved sons and daughters, are you acquainted with the following exclamation — "How lovely is thy dwelling, O Lord of Hosts!" — in Psalm 83. Does it not spring from your souls and does it not rise to your lips at this moment and in this basilica? Do you not perhaps hold some impression of the beauty of holy Church?

We are not speaking at this point of the monumental and artistic beauty of this great and magnificent church; neither do we refer to the spectacular view of this audience, though from this view could come the stimulation to think about and to discover the beauty of the holy Catholic Church.

**HOW DOES** this thought arise in our mind? From the visibility of the Church.

The true Church founded by the Lord is visible not only because it is composed of visible elements — the faithful, its structure, and the life of the Christian community, which go to make up its material aspect — but above all because it possesses an essential visibility of spiritual treasures which Christ gave to His Church.

The Church is visible precisely as its historical Founder and principal Head, the Man-God, was visible" (Scheeben, the Mysteries of Christ, p. 58).

This visibility of what the Church hides and at the same time reveals is one of the most interesting, delicate and surprising aspects of Catholic religious life, because the interior and essential visibility of the Church is none other than an effusion of its spirituality.

The visibility and spirituality of the Church are two related qualities which must not be separated in the study of the Church itself, just as they must not be separated in the life of Christians (cf. cf. Journet, L'Eglise II, 10 ss.).

This mutual response, this relationship of theirs, is shown to us ordinarily in two ways: one, which we may call intuitive, shows us the spirituality of the inner treasure of the Church when the exterior, visible and sensitive covering becomes transparent and lets us perceive and enjoy something of the ineffable beauty of the mystery of light and life which is proper to the Mystical Body of Christ. And it is through this means that art, when it possesses the genius of the sacred, and when it is truly art, when, in other words, it offers its magic ministry expressive of that which is spiritual — in that which is sensible, places itself in regal service to the faith.

This is why Catholicism has been and will always be the friend and promoter of the arts. The second way, which we might call indicative and intellectual, recalls to us, in response to a divine intention, how all of creation speaks to us of the Creator (Rom. 1, 20), and how in the economy of the Incarnation the use of an alphabet is granted to Catholic religious life, in other words, a means of expressing itself and of making itself understood, a means which is extremely elementary and identifiable with common experience, making use of sensible and familiar things to introduce us into the mysterious realm of spiritual reality.

It seems to reveal yet another characteristic: its continuance has, even more than the inevitable chain of causes that brought it on, a causal dependence (as in so many other war histories) on man's free will: it would suffice for them to express their wish, simultaneously, on both sides, and the war would be ended, fear of greater

word sign in our doctrine is a key word and is polyvalent.

You know how the sacramental doctrine is based on it: the sacrament is in fact not only "a sign of a sacred thing," but holds a particular sanctifying power (St. Thomas III, 60, 1 and 2). But you also know how this term of sign and sacrament applies to Christ Himself, as "... the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1, 15); and now, especially after the council, is attributed to the Church.

The council says "... the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1).

The Church is the sacred sign which expresses to us and confers on us Christ Himself. Looking at the Church we must see Christ in it. The material and temporal visibility of the Church must serve to give us a spiritual and non-temporal vision of the Lord. The Church is not an opaque screen but a transparent membrane through which it is easy for us to put ourselves in contact with Christ.

This penetration of our spirit by means of the Church becomes normal for those who know and love the Church, for those who truly belong to the Church and who participate in the transcendent and total communion that she offers. We have, easily and happily, some emotional and spiritual experience of this path which leads us to Christ when the Church shows us some sensibly represented "mark" of her own: here is how an assembly such as this, which gives us some indication of the unity and Catholicity of the Church, makes us thrill with singular jubilation as though we not only knew, but felt, that Jesus is here. This occurs at times when we see the Church in action, particularly during the liturgical celebration or in the fervent exercise of charity: here is Jesus.

But how is it that this transparency rarely becomes apparent? Rather, how is it that many people regard the Church as an obstacle, almost an impediment, not to say, an outright deformation of Christ?

It is well known how much the adversaries of the Church have written on this topic; also how many individuals find it difficult to discover in the concrete forms in which the Church presents herself, some consoling and shining Christian radiation.

We read a witnessing of our times: it is a soul still not baptized that tells its aversion to the Church: "... the shabbiness of the devout practices had the musty smell of poorly aired places. And then, the external pomp, the taste for luxury, of ornament, the abundance of devotions to the saints... A few weeks prior to my Baptism I still found it quite painful to join such a heterogeneous collectivity, which carries grave responsibilities in the course of history... I knew many contemptible, amorphous Catholics, indifferent to the injustices committed under their very eyes, etc." (cf. La vie spirituelle, November, 1965, p. 602).

How many such denunciations could be quoted!

How is it then that the Church does not show her virtue as a sign, her beauty, her prerogative of the presence of Christ? Oh, the answer to this would take a long time! Even the Lord Himself was not recog-

nized by everyone (cf. Matt. 13, 14).

However, we can be content with making two points: first, the Church appears obscure and not unlike merely human things to those who look at her only from the outside, to those who do not know her, to those who do not wish to recognize in her a transcendent secret of her own.

Second, the Church in some moments and in some aspects of hers is not beautiful, is not a splendid thing, does not make herself significant and audible

because her children are not exemplary and do not live as true Christians.

What a responsibility this is, what great guilt is sometimes incurred by those children of the Church who do not reflect the Church's spirituality and sanctity and who are not "signs" of Christ!

Do you know that the council applied the designation of "sign" to all the people of God, to all the faithful? And that all have the obligation of "witnessing" to Christ? That the council applied such a designation

to priests, the Religious, missionaries and Christian married couples?

Therefore all of us are invited to recognize and extol in the Church the sign and beauty of Christ: all of us are bound to share with our authentic Christian life in giving to the Church a more vital and operative capacity to radiate the saving and sanctifying splendor of Christ.

This exhortation is also for you, beloved children; we wish to aid you toward such a vocation with our apostolic blessing.



Pope Paul with African priests, nuns, lay people.

## An Appeal for World Peace

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and love have not been furthered sufficiently; even yet there are differences and conflicts threatening the stability of life in common in civil society.

To obtain this stability temporal interests are an inadequate driving force; so is human wisdom; driving forces are needed that transcend this world — those of religion, indeed of the Christian religion, which alone has the supreme strength that can overcome the shortcomings of mankind.

But meanwhile the world's attention, and ours too, is concentrated on the state of war that still exists in Vietnam, a war that is revealed as typical, tragic and threatening; for it is a once an ideological, civil and military war; the balance between the people involved turns on it; in it surprise tactics, the means of warfare used and the damage inflicted are steadily on the increase; and it is of supreme importance to the larger nations.

It seems to reveal yet another characteristic: its continuance has, even more than the inevitable chain of causes that brought it on, a causal dependence (as in so many other war histories) on man's free will: it would suffice for them to express their wish, simultaneously, on both sides, and the war would be ended, fear of greater

catastrophe would be set at rest, the honor of the contending parties would be safe, hope and peace would flourish once again in the world and mankind's appreciation of its great duty of universal brotherhood would have taken a happy step forward.

The truce that both sides have generously and spontaneously announced for this coming Christmas has filled the world with admiration and joy. We ourselves want to express once again our satisfaction and our praise.

Now one waits in hope that both sides may extend the truce and that from the suspension of hostilities it may be possible to advance to negotiations in good faith, the only way of reaching peace in freedom and justice. This once again makes plain where the true point of strategy lies in this sorrowful, paradoxical situation: in men's hearts. Good will holds the key to peace. The difficulty is that the responsible authorities of the two sides must make use of this key at the same time. That they should do so with sincere and concrete actions should be the wondrous event of this Christmas!

We would like to think that this miracle of good will is still possible; so, respectfully and fervently, we appeal to both contending parties and to all who lend support to either side.

And with these aspirations for peace, which we would wish to be promises of further and greater progress in the formation of an awareness of brotherhood among men, we send our Christmas good wishes to the people of Vietnam, and then to all the peoples of the earth, and to all international organizations for the promotion of concord and progress among nations.

Very special best wishes we address to young persons, who are so dear to us, that they may search for and find the right paths that will lead them to the real values of life, and that they may learn to give these values a place of honor in the new generation.

And next we greet you, our brothers in the episcopacy, priests and Religious, and all the faithful of the People of God.

And to all Christian families, to all charitable institutions, to all churches and parishes of the world, to our Christian brothers still separated from us, we extend our best wishes for a happy Christmas, in Christ our Saviour and Lord, in whose most holy name we impart to all who are listening to us, and indeed today to all men, our apostolic benediction.

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