

Pontiff Cites Vatican II as Synod Opens

Following is the text of Pope John Paul II's homily at the opening Mass for the Synod of Dutch Bishops.

Today our thoughts and hearts turn to the Lord, who is the Shepherd of the Church. It is he who is announced in the psalm of today's liturgy with words of peace and joy. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; / he makes me lie down in green pastures. / He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. / He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."



It is to Him, therefore, to Jesus Christ, that our thoughts and hearts turn because He is above all our shepherd.

He is the Shepherd of the whole Church and of all Churches. He is the Shepherd of shepherds. The shepherd of those to whom he entrusts pastoral solicitude for everything concerning the Church. He entrusts to them, he entrusts to us this pastoral ministry which is nothing but service.

We have inherited from the Apostles this consciousness of the pastoral ministry. Through it we try to direct our behaviour in relation to God and in relation to men, fixing our eyes on Christ. Is there anything more marvellous than this image of the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, which he himself showed us as the model to imitate? This image emerges already in the prophet Isaiah when he speaks of the Servant of the Lord on whom God has made his Spirit to repose.

"He will not cry or lift up his voice / or make it heard in the street; / a bruised reed he will not break, / and a dimly burning wick he will not quench." And he adds: "He will faithfully bring forth justice."

However, at the end of all the images known by Holy Scripture, there is this reality which is Christ himself. He expressed it in the parable of the Good Shepherd and he realized it at the same time through all his works. He accomplished it above all in his last work, through which he offered his life for his sheep.

To prepare his Apostles for this work which is the paschal summit of his mission, he talked to them at length, and the evangelist St. John has handed down to us, in particular, his last speech. The words that we read in the Gospel today are part of it.

"If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."

Could Christ have laid a greater obligation on us, as

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shepherds and teachers of the Church, than the one contained in these words? To be a pastor and bishop of souls, that means keeping the word. Keeping the truth. In it, it is the Father and he who comes continually to us: he who is the Word incarnate; he who is Christ the Redeemer; he who is the eternal Shepherd of souls. And he is above all the Shepherd of shepherds.

In the same farewell speech, of which we have just read a short passage today, Christ promises the Apostles the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of love and truth:

"But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

Here is the Church living by the Holy Spirit. The mouthpiece of this certainty is Paul of Tarsus in his letter to the Corinthians where he shows how, through the power of this Spirit, there is constructed this community which, in Christ, gathers as in one Mystical Body all those who "were made to drink of one Spirit."

In our difficult age, in our 20th century, this Church has given, in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, a particularly full expression of the truth about herself.

This teaching must be the measure of thought and action for all those who make up Christ's Church.

It must be, in particular, the measure of our own action, we who are the teachers and shepherds of the Church.

It must be the measure of our thought and action, of us who are gathered for this particular synod. The

reason for this synod is nothing but a true and complete incarnation, in life, of this apostolic truth about the Church, which was shown in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. It must remain its content, its inspiration and its purpose, from beginning to end.

The synodal assembly in the course of which the Bishops of the ecclesiastical Dutch Province meet the Bishop of Rome is an unprecedented event. We all realize this. The synods of Bishops have already their multi-annual rhythm; on the contrary, a synod of this kind, a particular synod, is taking place for the first time.

The principle of the mutual penetration of the universal Church and the local Church is expressed especially in this synod. The Church of Jesus Christ, thanks to the Spirit who is the soul of the whole body and all the members, is realized in these two dimensions. She is universal and local. The purpose of our meeting is to show the coherence of these two entire dimensions and to consolidate them.

That is why our thoughts and our hearts turn particularly to Christ: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ . . . Our thoughts and our hearts turn, therefore, to Christ. To the Shepherd and the Bishop of our souls. To the Shepherd of shepherds. Aware of the truth that we must serve, aware of the responsibility that we must assume, we meet together at this altar to celebrate the Eucharist, the sacrament of the death and resurrection, through which Christ continually gives us his Spirit, the Spirit of truth and love."

In this Spirit, let us go, therefore, towards this people, towards this community, which constitute all the dioceses in the Netherlands.

Let us go with great love.

Love is aware of the difficulties. But above all, it is aware of good; it is aware of gifts: the gifts of nature and the gifts of grace, which the Good Shepherd has spread in this community. Which he has placed in the heart of every redeemed man, giving him the freedom of the children of God.

The gifts that he awaits.

And that is why we wish above all, in this sign of bread and wine, to accept the spiritual gift of your people, the spiritual gift of this land of which you are at once the sons and shepherds.

Let us pray to Christ to accept this gift.

Let us pray finally, that he will imbue it with the light and grace of his Spirit, this Spirit who himself operates all good, by giving "to each one individually as he wills." This Spirit who builds up the Church and makes her "one body."

Nursing Home Suggestion

Editor:

Many people probably remember the deplorable conditions that were investigated by the State Moreland Commission on nursing homes five years ago but have forgotten that the final report of that commission ended with a pessimistic report by its chairman, Morris Abram, who concluded that "another investigation will almost certainly be required in five to ten years."

Sure enough. Officials in New York's Office of Health Systems Management are saying that patient abuse and inadequate enforcement of minimal standards in nursing homes are still serious problems.

Nursing personnel at these facilities are frequently poorly motivated and grossly underpaid. Although nursing home operators complain about insufficient reimbursement from governmental agencies, and use this to rationalize substandard conditions for

patients and direct care employees, I personally believe that the majority of nursing home owners make out like bandits.

I'd like to see New York adopt a statute similar to one in Minnesota where it is a crime to fail to provide the basic decencies for institutionalized patients.

Now that the problems plaguing nursing homes are again in the news, it's also important for all of us to show more genuine interest and involvement in the lives of nursing home patients who, as Anthony Liccione pointed out in a letter to the Courier last year, often suffer the agonizing loneliness of being stigmatized and kept apart from the lives of others.

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Ersatz' Mass For Blacks?

Editor:

If I were black, I would

deeply resent the condescending nature of the "fun and games" liturgy at St. Bridget's (as reported in Upstate magazine), which implies a shallow spiritualism on the part of the congregation. I am sure most black people are sufficiently intelligent to see through the abomination foisted on them by the diocese.

Would not the Catholic Church be better served by raising the congregation's awareness of the sacred meaning of the Mass and its significance as to God's overwhelming love for us? The Church has a teaching function which has fallen into disuse. Blacks being a rather recent addition to the Church in the U.S. haven't had the opportunity to study the faith like those already in the Church. If given the opportunity they are equal to the task. Serving up an ersatz religion is perpetrating a fraud on a very spiritual people.

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