

# Christ's Light Illumines a Gloomy World

Following are excerpts from Pope John Paul II's address to Vatican government office workers.

Here you are gathered together, you who work in the service of the government offices, with your dear ones, and the workers of the firms which carry out work in the Vatican, with their respective families.



The first feeling in my heart for you is gratitude. I am certain that each of you carries out his own tasks with a sense of responsibility and generous dedication, endeavoring to make his own active contribution to the smooth operation of the whole complex, not limited to buildings, but above all a social one, which goes under the name of the Vatican.

I am glad, therefore to take this opportunity to express to all my appreciation and to say "thank you" to everyone.

I would like the expression of this feeling of gratitude of mine to make you feel better the cordiality which characterizes my relationship with you and which you certainly share: a relationship which is not and cannot be limited to that of "employer-employee," as it is called, but rather, and above all, the relationship of a father, in need of help, with the sons who give him this help. This does not mean, of course, that in this relationship there should not reign supreme the criteria of justice and the regard due to the dignity of the work and the personality of the worker, be he a clerk or a workman; criteria and regard which, in fact, following in the footsteps of my nearest great predecessors, I intend to assert more and more, in principles and practice.

But it means that, over and above these requirements, I wish to be for you — and as such you certainly wish to see me and consider me — the father who, in addition to what is rightly due to you, wishes to give you his affection.

This leads me to testify to you a second sentiment: that of my deep and sincere solicitude for you and your families. It is a sentiment I feel for all those in the world who live by their own work and experience the



**'Go... to Christ and be faithful to him... in the limpid consistency of your actions.'**

satisfactions of work, but also its difficulties; but it applies particularly to you, so close to me. It is a sentiment in which there enters, in the first place, consideration of the material problems of your existence, which it is my desire and intention to meet, as far as it is possible for me to do so, and to the extent that the conditions of the Apostolic See permit, in the most suitable forms and ways.

I know these problems; and I know, in particular, the concern — and sometimes the anguish — of you parents with regard to the future of your children.

You will not be surprised, certainly, that the pope should take advantage of this opportunity to exhort you to a renewed effort of consistency with the principles of faith you profess; if he encourages you to let yourselves be won over more and more deeply by the joy of knowing that you are personally loved by Christ. He became a little child, poor and helpless, so that no one would be afraid of him, but would feel, on the contrary, attracted to approach him with full confidence and with spontaneous love.

Go, you, too, to Christ and be faithful to him in the first place in the intimacy of your personal feelings, then in the courageous testimony of your words, and finally — and this is what is most important — in the limpid consistency of your actions.

Never be ashamed to say that you are Christians, and behave in such a way that Christ will never have to be ashamed of you. Make your children thrill with enthusiasm at the nobility of the ideals that guide your existence. Make them realize with the honesty of your morals, with the uprightness of your conduct, with the charity to your neighbor and sensitiveness to the needs of every brother of ours, who a Christian is and what a peaceful and just society he is able to construct.

With these sentiments I address you my best wishes. Unfortunately, 1980 has not opened under encouraging auspices. Ranging over the world scene, one is instinctively inclined to apply to our times the words of the prophetic text of Isaiah, which we will hear tomorrow: "darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples." We however, cannot and do not want to surrender to discouragement before the gloomy forecasts which rise on so many sides. We are helped by the proclamation that Isaiah makes in that same text to all those who, in faith, are part of the people of God, the new Jerusalem: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."

The light to which the Prophet refers, is Christ. During these 20 centuries of history, whole generations have found in this message, constantly echoed by the Church, the answer that satisfies their questions, comforts their anxieties, guides them and sustains them in difficult moments. Really "nations have come to his light!" Well, there are a good many signs which bear witness to a renewed interest on the part of this generation of ours in the person of Christ and in his Gospel. There is, therefore, reason for hoping and for feeling bound to cooperate more generously in spreading the light which comes from Christ "the Redeemer of man, the center of the universe and of history."

In this perspective I renew to you and to your dear ones, above all to your children, to whom our thought goes particularly in these days in which we contemplate in the Crib, God become a child, my heartfelt wishes for inner serenity, welfare and peace.

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## Insights in Liturgy

By Father Robert J. Kennedy

### Sacrament For Lent

Baptism and Penance are the Lenten sacraments.

Traditionally, Lent has been the period of intense preparation of those preparing for their Christian initiation at the Easter Vigil. Catechumens (those preparing for baptism) took this time as a kind of retreat during which they purified their commitment to become full members of the Church and grew more deeply in a knowledge of the faith they would profess at their initiation. Baptism, then, was — and is — the primary reason for Lent.

As the faithful members of the Church worked to support the catechumens in their final preparation for baptism, they realized the need to spend time and effort in the renewal of their own baptismal commitment. Some who had broken with the Church community through grave sin sought to be reconciled in this Lenten period as well, so as to be ready to celebrate in purity of heart the Easter Triduum. And so Penance, with both a small and a capital "P", became the way in which Christians renewed the baptismal life within them.

Penance cannot be understood apart from Baptism. Lent and Baptism are not just for catechumens, but for us all.

What then is Baptism? It is, first of all, an incorporation

into Christ. We go deep into the chaotic waters of Baptism and die with him, and rise a new creation in him. This makes us sharers in his life, no longer slaves of sin but children of God, heirs of the kingdom, members of Christ's body, the Church.

That incorporation into Christ means that we belong to him, and belonging to him means that we have an identity, a unique identity. That identity is drawn from the death and resurrection of Christ which becomes the power for our living and the pattern against which all the events and circumstances of our lives are understood. In other words, the death and resurrection of Christ is the source of energy for Christian faith and Christian living; and it gives meaning and value to the crazy jigsaw of our lives.

This identification with Christ means more: it means that our values in life are those of the Gospel. If Baptism commits us to a Christian way of living, then it commits us to living the way of the Gospel. This style of Gospel living is a way of hospitality, healing, mercy, valuing the dignity of each human person and all life, the challenge of the holiness of God, humble service of neighbor, reverence for nature, joyfulness and gratitude.

Taking these values to heart ultimately means that we take as our responsibility the proclamation of the Good

News we have received. It means that these values become the motives for all the actions of our lives, and so take on the mission of Christ as our own lifelong work.

It is in this baptismal context that the sacrament of Penance is understood. How faithful have we been to the Christ in whom we dwell, how deeply have we lived in the mystery of his death and resurrection, how much have we kept the Gospel in view, how responsible have we been in fulfilling our Christian mission? Unfortunately, the answers to these questions are not always positive.

Penance helps us to come to terms with our waywardness, the ways in which we reject our status as God's sons and daughters. But like the prodigal, we find that our feeble return is met by the merciful welcome of the Lord. We are renewed in the full life of Christ, being reconciled with God. Here is the opportunity for us to move off a superficial living of the Christ-life and to plunge deeply into the joy and challenge of God's mercy. Here the work of our conversion to Christ finds strength and renewed energy. Here we recommit ourselves to the Gospel values and the Christian mission.

That's why Penance in any form cannot be hurried or casual. It takes six weeks of honest self-appraisal to root out the seductions that rob us of our baptismal innocence. It is the job of realigning our motives with the values of the Gospel.

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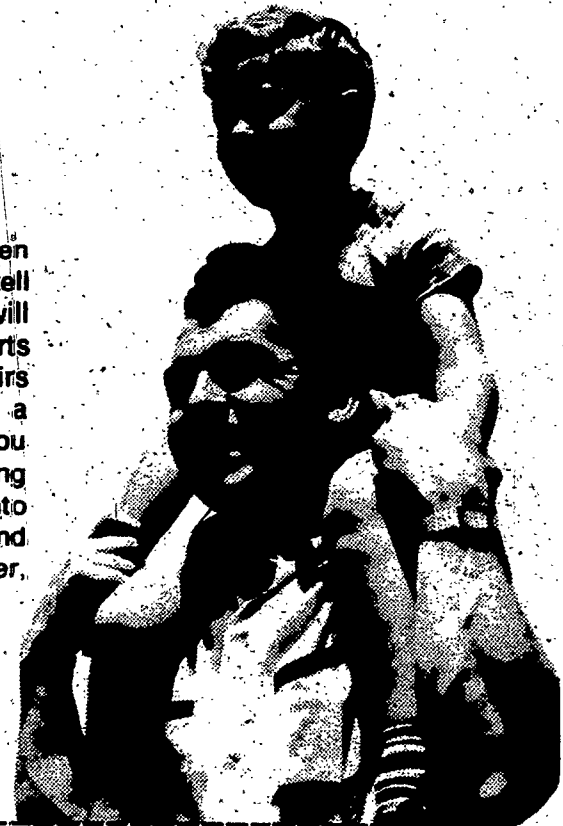
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