

*A pastoral letter to the people of God of Kokomo, Indiana
on how God shepherds us through His Church and how we
are called to accept His shepherding with love and obedience*

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Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introductory Letter.....	5
The Lord Is My Shepherd.....	8
The Good Shepherd Lays Down His Life For the Sheep.....	12
There Shall Be One Flock, One Shepherd.....	17
I Fear No Evil; For Thou Art With Me.....	23
He Leads Me Beside Still Waters.....	30
Thy Rod and Thy Staff, They Comfort Me.....	33
He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness.....	40
Mother of the Shepherd and Mother of the Sheep.....	47
Conclusion – He Goes Before Them, and The Sheep Follow Him.....	55
Addendum I – Prayers.....	61
Magisterium Chronological Bibliography.....	63

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, I present to you my third pastoral letter, “*The Lord Is My Shepherd*” (Ps. 23:1). This pastoral letter addresses the important role of salvation entrusted to Holy Mother Church by her spouse and our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Jesus’ love for us is so great that He desires to shepherd us and to make His love accessible to us always and forever in and through His Church. For me, Saints Peter and Paul have always been models of what an earthly shepherd after the heart of our Good Shepherd should look like. They are very human, yet very desirous of being faithful to their baptismal grace and vocation. They simply want to love God and, by loving Him, they are faithful to His great commission to be witnesses of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. They imitate Jesus so perfectly that they give Him their lives in doing so.

In my life, I came to understand Christ’s love for me in His Church as I read the works of Saint Therese of Lisieux. One day, while reflecting on chapters 12 and 13 of the Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, she has the intuition under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that “*Love includes all other vocations...then in an excess of overflowing joy, I exclaimed 'Jesus, my love, I have finally found my vocation...in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be LOVE.'"* To truly love Jesus necessarily means we must love the Church precisely because she is our Mother, holy and without sin. She only wants what is good for us, which is our eternal good – heaven! Yet that good is something more than we often want for ourselves. Saint Therese came to realize this truth in this moment of inspiration when she says that “she shall be LOVE in the heart of the Church.” Ultimately, what she is saying is that she wants to be the perfect child. She realizes that in being the perfect child of Jesus and His Bride the Church, she will have perfect happiness (beatitude) and therefore Love. I realized as I meditated on this quote from Saint Therese that that same desire naturally welled up inside of me. I realized, more than I ever had before, that I needed the Church to attain beatitude and eternal life! It is precisely in the Church that Jesus shepherds me. Without the Church, I tend to stray and create my own way on the wide path that only leads to perdition, as opposed to the narrow path of His way, truth and life, which leads to heaven.

As I recently reminded you during my homily on the *Ascension of our Lord into heaven*, the Church is a divine institution guided by our Good Shepherd and the power of the Holy Spirit, and she is thus free from error in matters of faith and morals. She is our spiritual Mother because she gives spiritual birth to us in baptism. In her, we receive all of the spiritual nourishment we could possibly ever need as we continually grow in faith, hope and charity on our journey through this life to heaven. In her, we have received from our Good Shepherd Sacred Scripture, Tradition (the Creed, Sacraments, Liturgy, Morals, Prayer, Hierarchy and Apostolic Succession) and the Magisterium – our maternal teaching office. Because of this, I receive great comfort and consolation from the loving care provided by the Church.

As wonderful and beautiful as the Church is in her spiritual dimension, we need to remember that the Church is both a spiritual and visible reality. The Church is essentially divine and human, and this means that the visible society of the Church is under the earthly leadership of humans. While the divine reality is perfect and without stain or defilement, that truth is not always reflected in her visible society. Up and down the centuries, we can see her human failings and, quite frankly, they can be very painful. At times, we can easily be distracted by those failings. The devil always tries to use those failings to cast doubt upon us so that we might look less credibly upon Holy Mother Church. I know I have been seduced into this way of thinking in the past. And yet, thanks be to God, Jesus is still able to shepherd His Church through these human struggles and sins. As a matter of fact, when we are rooted in a life of prayer, He always provides the necessary grace to seek Him whenever we struggle and doubt after witnessing the sins of members of the Body of Christ. It is precisely through a life of prayer, penance and acts of charity that He invites us to make reparation for the sinful actions of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. As the Church, we are a family, and when one of us fails, it is incumbent upon the rest of us to assist Jesus to bring healing to the wounded body. Saint Paul reminds us that we are called “to complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col. 1:24).

Sometimes in this human society of the Church, it is difficult for us to be faithful; we can sometimes make excuses for not wanting to participate in her life and we can journey away from the rest of the flock. Yet, we must understand that we will never find true peace and happiness in straying from the Church. It is only when the Good Shepherd comes in search of us and invites us back into His flock, and we positively respond to His loving invitation, that He places us on His shoulders and restores us to a life of grace.

If you desire this life of grace that we are all offered in baptism, which is our true vocation; if you desire to experience the Love of the Good Shepherd and His Bride and our Mother, the Church; and if you desire to live your true vocation and make a difference like Saint Therese of Lisieux by being Love in the heart of the Church, please join me as we journey through Psalm 23.

In the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Ted Dudzinski", with a horizontal line underneath.

Rev. Fr. Ted Dudzinski
Pastor
St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church
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Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

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.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;

for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”¹ During my priesthood, I have seen holy Mother Church attacked in so many ways – from those outside of the Church and regrettably also from those within her ranks. As her faithful son, it is my duty to defend her honor, and, as a priest, that means instructing the flock entrusted to me about what the Church is and about the love and obedience we must show to her. In light of recent scandals, I see where Satan continues to tempt us by trying to separate us from our Mother, the Church. For those of us who have remained faithful and have stayed close to the Church, Satan tries to tempt us through discouragement, leading us to succumb to the attacks of the enemy. But we must always remember the words of Christ: “The powers of death shall not prevail” against the Church.²

When Satan has tried to tempt me with that same discouragement, I have received great consolation from the Twenty-Third Psalm. In these words of King David, we too boast that the Lord is our shepherd. However, the opening verse is more than just a statement of fact; it is a statement of what the Lord *actively does* in our lives. Quite literally, “Dominus pascit me” means, “The Lord shepherds me.” Yes, the Lord is my Shepherd, but He is also actively engaged in the ongoing task of shepherding me – now, in the present. But that leads us to ask: if Jesus ascended into heaven at the end of His ministry here on earth, how does He shepherd me in the ordinary events of my day-to-day life? He shepherds us *through His Church*. His love for us is made manifest in the Church, and it is there that we continue to encounter Christ, especially in the Eucharist. Knowing that in the Church, Christ’s grace superabounds,³ it is with great confidence that we look to the Church for our sustenance. Thus, in these trying times, Holy Mother Church says to us what Our Lady of Guadalupe said to St. Juan Diego: “Am I not here, I who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, the crossing of my arms? Am I not the source of all your joy? What more do you need? Let nothing else worry you, disturb you.”⁴

Understanding the identity of the Church is not primarily an intellectual activity; rather, it is a participation in God’s great love for us. When a man and a woman are dating, it is their growing love for one another that fosters an increased understanding of who the other person is. Neither the man nor the woman is a passive participant; each actively seeks to know and to be known. Love seeks greater knowledge, and greater knowledge engenders a greater love. So it must be in our relationship with the Church. Thus, Saint Paul in his great treatise on love says, “Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.”⁵ To

¹ Psalm 23:1

² Matthew 16:18b

³ Cf. Romans 5:20

⁴ Words of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, December 12, 1531

⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:12b

those outside the love relationship, the sacrifices the lover makes for his beloved may seem to be illogical or extreme; yet, for the lover who actively participates in that relationship, these sacrifices make sense. So it is with God's relationship with us, the Church. Every page of Scripture captures the Lord's whispers of love for His Bride, the Church. The very phrase "Divine Revelation" alludes to God's intimate relationship with us. It is no accident that the image God Himself chooses to describe His relationship with His Church is that of a bridegroom and his bride.⁶ Motivated by love for his bride, the bridegroom shares with her all that he owns. So too, Christ desires to be intimately united to each and every one of us, and He shares with us, His Bride, the Church, all that is rightfully His – His Mother, His participation in the life of the Trinity, the merits won by His death on the cross, and even His own Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is only in the Church that we can fully discover these magnificent gifts that Jesus has bestowed upon His beloved. And just as in marriage, the bridegroom and the bride are not two, but "one flesh"⁷, so too with Christ the Bridegroom and His Church the Bride. For though the Church consists of many individual members, we are all literally "one body in Christ"⁸. And in this body, Christ is the head and the Church is the body, for just as a body cannot function without the head, so too the Church cannot exist apart from Christ.⁹

If we are to get to the point where we recognize Christ shepherding us through His Church, we must first see the Church as she truly is, not how society portrays her. What a great difference there is between a loyal son or daughter who loves the Church and a person who seeks to destroy her. The son or daughter seeks to know his mother so that he can love her as he ought; and in seeking to understand who the Church is, he gains a greater understanding of who he himself is. On the other hand, the thieves and robbers¹⁰ only seek knowledge of the Church so as to destroy her.

Both the son and the thief see how members of the Church can act in ways that are inconsistent with their identity, but they judge these events very differently. The thief ignores the wisdom of a Church that Christ has sustained for over 2,000 years; he ignores the standards that the Lord of History has established for judging historical events. In contrast, Cardinal Ratzinger writes, "Compatibility with the base memory of the Church is the standard for judging what is to be considered historically and objectively accurate."¹¹ The faithful son or daughter of the Church objectively sees the areas where the Church is in need of ongoing conversion and he or she seeks to do what is necessary to bring about that conversion. Motivated by an *agape* love, he or she wants what is best for the Church. Pope John Paul II reminds us that it is only when we are motivated by such love that we can truly begin to understand who the Church is. In the first encyclical of his pontificate, John Paul II writes that the "Church's consciousness,

⁶ Cf. Hosea 2:16-23, Ephesians 5:21-33, and Revelation 22:17

⁷ Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5-6

⁸ Romans 12:5

⁹ Cf. Ephesians 5:23

¹⁰ Cf. John 10:10

¹¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 20

enlightened and supported by the Holy Spirit and fathoming more and more deeply both her divine mystery and her human mission, and even her human weaknesses – this consciousness is and must remain the first source of the Church's love, as love in turn helps to strengthen and deepen her consciousness.”¹²

When we start with the premise that the Church is our loving Mother,¹³ everything changes. As children, we might not have always understood why our parents asked us to do certain things and we may not have always agreed with their discipline, but with the wisdom of age, we can look back and see where our parents acted out of love, seeking to do what was in our best interest. So too it is with the Church. As a result, “We must flee from falsely seeing the spiritual life as nothing more than a restriction of freedom, doctrinal formation as a mere collection of obscure formulae, and apostolate as a kind of extra part-time job to fill one’s spare hours.”¹⁴

Seeing the Church as our Mother also means that we have a vested interest in what happens to her. We not only must be the agents that bring about the conversion that is always necessary, but we must also be the first recipients of that message of conversion. At all costs, we must avoid the error of Luther who sought to reform the Church by distancing himself from her. On the contrary, our attitude must be that of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, who teaches, “To be in the Church is already much, but it is not enough. We must *be* the Church, because our Mother must never be a stranger to us, something external, foreign to our deepest thoughts.”¹⁵

In examining the spiritual reality of the Church, it is also important to consider it in light of the central mystery of Christian faith and life: the inner-life of the Trinity.¹⁶ “The concept of *communion* lies ‘at the heart of the Church's self-understanding.’”¹⁷ Our communion with the Trinity and with each other is lived out **in** the Church. In this statement, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith makes it clear that the Church is the means chosen by God Himself for us to enter into the very life of the Most Holy Trinity. This is especially evident when we consider what happens at our Baptism, for it is at that moment that the Trinity comes to dwell in our soul and, at the same time, that we are incorporated into the Church.¹⁸ Since the Trinity is a mystery rooted in the love of each Person of the Godhead, the Church is essentially a mystery rooted in the **love** of the Trinity for us and our **participation in that love**. In my second pastoral letter, I wrote about the need of remaining in that love by staying close to Christ in the Eucharist; in this

¹² Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, 3

¹³ Cf. Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magister*, 1

¹⁴ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, xxi

¹⁵ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 18

¹⁶ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 234

¹⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communio Notio*, 3

¹⁸ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1267

letter, the focus is our relationship with the Church, since remaining in God's love necessitates that we remain close to His Church.

In the chapters of this pastoral letter, I invite you to join me in meditating on the mystery of **God's great love** for us as seen in the "Shepherd Psalm." As we pray over each word of this psalm, we must remember that these words are those of a sheep who has lived an entire year in the loving care of its shepherd. That sheep has experienced firsthand what the Shepherd is willing to do to keep it united to the flock, that is, the Church, and how the Shepherd rejoices when He returns the sheep to the fold.¹⁹ Although I have not been a shepherd in the physical sense of the word, as a result of my ordination, Christ has appointed me to be a shepherd of souls. As a spiritual shepherd, I have gained greater insight into the spiritual life through studying the day to day routine of Palestinian shepherds and their sheep, particularly through a very helpful book by W. Phillip Keller entitled *A Shepherd's Look at Psalm 23*. It is my hope that through this letter, I might fulfill my duty to feed the sheep entrusted to me²⁰ and that you, too, might appreciate the great gift of the Church through which Christ continues to shepherd us. For as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith reminds us, "Catholics are bound to profess that through the *gift* of God's mercy they belong to that Church which Christ founded and which is governed by the successors of Peter and the other Apostles, who are the depositories of the original Apostolic tradition, living and intact, which is the permanent heritage of doctrine and holiness of that same Church."²¹

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When I meditate on Psalm 23, what ways come to mind as I consider the ways God shepherds us through His Church?
2. What is my attitude or disposition towards the Church? Do I see her as a loving mother and teacher or as an impersonal entity that infringes upon my freedom?
3. Have I ever truly reflected on the fact that the Church and Christ are one body, and that Christ seeks to marry each one of us, in a sense? How does that change my perception of the Church?

¹⁹ Cf. Luke 15:3-7

²⁰ Cf. John 21:15-19

²¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 1 (emphasis added)

THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP

The Birth of the Church

“I am the good shepherd...and I lay down my life for the sheep.”²² If you were to ask someone when Christ founded His Church, they might turn to the passage in Matthew when Christ entrusted Peter with the keys of the kingdom²³; indeed, these very words encircle the cupola of Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome. At the same time, the Church traditionally looks to two major events when considering the birth of the Church – the blood and water coming forth from the side of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. These two events are intimately connected, and both reveal part of the story of the Church in every age. As well, we can look to the Old Testament (especially in the stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David) to see how God was preparing the way for the foundation of His Church. Through His many covenants, He was preparing the way for the Church to be the means for uniting all of mankind in a familial relationship with Himself.²⁴ In this context, we come to realize that the Church is not only the means God has chosen to unite us *to Himself*, but the Church also is the means chosen to unite us *to one another*. “[God] has willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness.”²⁵ In light of all these events of salvation history, it would be a great error to think of the Church as merely the invention of Christ’s apostles. Rather, we are called to consider the divine origins of the Church. Thus, Cardinal Ratzinger writes, “The origin of the Church is not the decision of men; she is not the product of human willing but a creature of the Spirit of God.”²⁶

In our meditation on the birth of the Church, let us gaze upon the Lord at the moment that the Roman soldier thrust his lance into our Shepherd’s Sacred Heart, the moment when the Lamb of God was sacrificed on the wood of the cross for our salvation. Just a few minutes before that, Jesus was alive on that cross, and, from His throne, He looked down upon His subjects who were taunting Him and hurling insults at Him. Surely, the words of the prophet Zechariah weighed heavily on His heart, that Satan would strike the shepherd so as to scatter the sheep of the flock.²⁷ And despite our betrayal, His fidelity and love for us remain constant.²⁸ Having already given us Himself in the Eucharist and having given us Mary as our own mother, He desired to bestow another gift upon us – the Church. To her, He would entrust both of these gifts so that they might be shared with every people in every age and that we might never be without His shepherding care.²⁹ For there at the foot of the cross stood not only the Israelites, who had

²² John 10:14-15

²³ Cf. Matthew 16:18-19

²⁴ Cf. Scott Hahn, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*

²⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 781

²⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 43

²⁷ Cf. Zechariah 13:7 and Matthew 26:31

²⁸ Cf. 2 Timothy 2:13

²⁹ Cf. Matthew 9:36

gathered from all over the world to celebrate the Passover, but also us, the Church. When Christ is lifted upon the cross, He draws us all to Himself through the Church.³⁰ And standing next to us beneath the Cross is the Blessed Mother. From that moment onward, Mary is always present with the Church. Just as she participated in her Son's passion with John, the Beloved Disciple, at her side, Mary is always at our side when the Church re-presents her Son's Passion, Death, and Resurrection in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. As Pope John Paul II reminds us in his final encyclical, "The Church was born of the paschal mystery. For this very reason the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding way the sacrament of the paschal mystery, *stands at the centre of the Church's life.*"³¹

Faithfully, Mary stood beneath the Cross of her Son until that moment when He bowed His head and handed over His spirit.³² It would be more than fifty days later that the Church would witness the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but already at the death of Jesus, we hear of Him sending forth the Spirit to sanctify the early Church. The Holy Spirit (who is known as the Sanctifier) continues to this day to be present in the Church and to use her in His work of making us holy. But what is the primary means that the Holy Spirit uses to make us holy if not the Sacraments? The Church has always seen the water and blood that flowed from the side of Christ as a manifestation of the Sacraments, particularly Baptism and the Eucharist. What a marvelous expression of the connection between our participation in the Church and our participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ! For it is through Baptism that we enter into both the Church and the Paschal mystery. Being united to Christ the Head requires that we also be united to the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church; for there is no union with Christ apart from union with His Church. The Catechism beautifully portrays this union when it says, "The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. 'The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus.' 'For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the "wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.'" As Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam's side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross."³³ So too Saint Paul writes, "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with that word."³⁴

As Christ's life had a clear mission, so too does the life of the Church, whose life is born of Christ's life, and this mission is thus: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."³⁵ For nine days (the original novena), the early Church

³⁰ Cf. John 12:32

³¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 3

³² Cf. John 19:30b

³³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 766

³⁴ Ephesians 5:25-26

³⁵ Matthew 28:19-20

gathered in the Upper Room devoting itself to prayer³⁶ and awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit who would empower them for this mission. Through the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Church was born and Peter would address all those in Jerusalem to tell them that what came from the side of Christ on Good Friday was available for them too if only they would repent and be baptized.³⁷

That same call to repentance and Baptism has echoed throughout the centuries, and in his reflections on the Church, Cardinal Ratzinger continues this comparison between the events of Pentecost and the events of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church when he writes, “It can be said that we find here [in the Pentecost scene] a preliminary sketch of a Church that lives in manifold and multiform particular Churches but that precisely that way is the one Church. At the same time, Luke expresses with this image the fact that at the moment of her birth, the Church was already catholic, already a world Church.”³⁸ Just as the events of Christ’s passion occurred during a great Jewish feast when pilgrims from all over the world were present, the coming of the Holy Spirit took place during the Jewish Feast of Weeks. The presence of Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, and others expresses the universality (that is, “catholicity”) of the Church. The Holy Spirit calls all peoples to the Church and to the Sacraments through the words of Peter. Thus, in these events, we see the important role that Peter (and his successors) is to have in the Church, and at the same time we see his unique relationship with the Holy Spirit in bringing about the Spirit’s work. Regarding this relationship, Saint Ambrose says, “Where Peter is, there is the Church; and where the Church is, not death, but eternal life reigns.”³⁹

By frequently meditating upon the events of Pentecost, the Church is reminded of who she is and who God calls her to be. Pope Paul VI call the universal Church to this meditation when he writes, “The Church's awareness of its divine mission coincided with its birth. Both events are celebrated at Pentecost. Both will develop together. The Church, that is, will develop as a well-organized, hierarchic and social body, and at the same time its awareness of its vocation, of its inner nature, its doctrine, and its mission, will likewise develop.”⁴⁰

This awareness of the Church’s vocation can also increase by contemplating the foreshadowings of the Church in the Old Testament. The Catechism explains how God prepared us for the foundation of the Church from the moment of Adam and Eve’s fall in chapter three of Genesis: “The gathering together of the People of God began at the moment when sin destroyed the communion of men with God, and that of men among themselves. The gathering together of

³⁶ Cf. Acts of the Apostles 1:14

³⁷ Cf. Acts of the Apostles 2:14-38

³⁸ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 44

³⁹ St. Ambrose, *In XII Ps Enarratio*, 40, 30

⁴⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 22

the Church is, as it were, God's reaction to the chaos provoked by sin."⁴¹ After the fall, sin became so prevalent that God was sorry that He had created man,⁴² but He never did abandon us.

The ark which God had instructed Noah to build is a great symbol of the Church. Just as those in the ark were saved from the destruction due to sin, so too the Church guides us safely through the valley of death to our heavenly home. God blessed Noah and his family for their obedience; so too God repeatedly blesses us if we are obedient to His will as He makes it known through His Church.

God's preparation for gathering together His people into one Church can also be seen in the call of Abraham. In calling Abraham, God chose one branch of the human family to be a sign of the future gathering of all the nations.⁴³ In Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, he also says of Abraham that he "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."⁴⁴ In our own case, the Church also provides us with the means to grow stronger in our faith. As pilgrims in a foreign land, the Church follows in the footsteps of Abraham who trusted God and left the comforts of his homeland to go wherever the Lord would lead him.

God's chosen people continued to grow in numbers throughout the Old Testament, and His special love for His people was especially visible in the lives of Moses and David. In the book of Exodus, we see how God showed that love by revealing Himself directly to Moses and the Israelites. To no other people did God make His will known in such a clear way. In the time of David, God dwelled with His people in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem. Through both Moses and David, it is evident that God's relationship with His people (the precursor to the Church) was unique. Yet, the New Covenant in brings forth the New Temple in Christ. Saint John Chrysostom emphasizes the response we should have to this special act of love that God shows to us when he says, "Do not separate yourself from the Church. Nothing is stronger than the Church. Your hope is the Church; your salvation is the Church; your refuge is the Church. It is higher than the heavens, and broader than the earth; it never grows old, its vigour is eternal."⁴⁵ Thus, when we see the love of God in founding His Church, we are certainly compelled to see the Church as the great gift that she is and to strive to be always faithful to her.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do I live out Pentecost in my day-to-day life?
2. In what ways do I see the Holy Spirit continuing to act in the Church today?
3. Do I see the Church as a living expression of Christ's love for me?

⁴¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 761

⁴² Cf. Genesis 6:6

⁴³ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 762

⁴⁴ Romans 4:20-21

⁴⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilia de Capto Eutropio*, 6

4. What responsibility do I have to share with others the great gift that Christ has given me through His foundation of the Church?

THERE SHALL BE ONE FLOCK, ONE SHEPHERD

The Nature of the Church

To paraphrase something I heard from Father Corapi and to apply it here locally, I ask you the following question: If you were asked how many priests are in Kokomo, what would you say? Four...five...you aren't sure. The correct answer to that question is one. There is one priest, one shepherd for the Church in Kokomo and for the Church throughout the world – that priest and shepherd is Jesus Christ. I, your pastor, and the other priests assigned here to assist me do not act on our own when carrying out our ministry; rather, “it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, teacher of Truth.”⁴⁶ But as Christ's sheep, it would be very natural for us to ask how we know that we are part of His flock, and how can we be sure that the men assigned to shepherd us are commissioned by the Shepherd to participate in His work of saving us.

As I alluded to earlier, I think we can learn a lot about the answer to that question by examining the practices of Palestinian shepherds. First, we must consider what the shepherd must do in order to rightly call the sheep his own. Obviously, the first thing that he needs to do is purchase them, and Christ paid the ultimate price for us, His Church, through His sacrifice on the cross.⁴⁷ But even after the shepherd has paid for his sheep and brought them home, they are not yet ready to graze upon his lush pastures. Before enjoying the benefits of belonging to the shepherd, the sheep must be permanently marked as being his. He does this by cutting his branding mark into the ears of the sheep for, even though the shepherd has paid for his sheep, a sheep that has not been marked can easily be stolen from the fold and marked as belonging to someone else.

It is interesting to see how the shepherd goes about choosing how to mark his sheep. He must choose something that is unique, often something connected to himself, so that others can readily identify the sheep as his. For example, someone who was a third-born son and originally from Kokomo may cut three slits in the sheep's left ear and notch out something like a “K” in the right ear. Thus, the marks on the sheep also reveal something about who the owner is. Applying this to Christ, we know that He is the one who chose the marks of His Church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) and that these marks also reveal something about our Shepherd. His humanity and divinity together constitute His *one* person; He is the *holy* one who came to save us; His sacrifice on the cross is truly the universal (that is, “*catholic*”) sacrifice for all mankind; and He is the one who has been sent (which is what “*apostle*” means) by the Father for our salvation. From the cross, our Shepherd put His four marks on the Church, and in our Baptism, as we are sealed with the sign of the cross, we are united with that Church and marked permanently as belonging to the Good Shepherd. The lamb has done nothing itself to merit

⁴⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1548

⁴⁷ Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:20

being purchased by the shepherd and being marked as his possession; it all comes about through the shepherd's loving selection of his sheep.

When a shepherd marks his sheep, he knows that his ownership of them is just beginning. By marking his sheep, he commits himself to providing for their ongoing care because sheep are utterly dependent upon the shepherd for their care. If a shepherd were to purchase his sheep, mark them, and just leave them in a pasture to fend for themselves, they would die. The condition of the flock, then, directly reflects back upon the shepherd. When Christ instituted the Church and marked her, He was committing Himself to her ongoing care, and through His representatives (the pope, bishops, and priests), He remains with us to the close of the age.⁴⁸

Through the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the Church is daily brought back to these truths about her foundation. In fact, at each Eucharistic celebration we are actually there at the founding of the Church. Thus, it should be with great love and devotion that we sing out the words of the classic hymn which describes how Christ purchased, marked, and continues to care for His flock: "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; she is His new creation by water and the Word. From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride; with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died."⁴⁹ As members of His Church, it is necessary that everything we do is faithful to the foundation. For unless the Lord builds the house (His Church), we labor in vain.⁵⁰ The opposite is equally true – that anyone who builds on the foundation of the rock can be confident that the house will not fall when the rains and floods come.⁵¹ Thus, Saint Augustine writes, "The Church will shake if her foundation shifts; but can Christ be moved? As long as Christ remains her immovable base, the Church will remain strong until the end of time."⁵²

As we consider the four marks of the Church, we must remember that they make an integral whole and that all four are essential if we are to identify *the* Church established by Christ. If any of these marks is missing, it is not the Church that Christ established; if the Shepherd's mark was four notches in the ear of the sheep, a sheep with only three of the notches is not part of that flock. We must also remember that each of the four marks mutually compliments the other three (for example, unity is at the service of the holiness, universality, and mission of the Church). As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council write, "The true Church of Christ is constituted and recognized, by divine authority, in the four marks which in the creed we affirm as to be believed. And each of these marks is so united with the others that it cannot be separated from them."⁵³ When we look at each of these marks, it is also important that we approach them with a supernatural attitude – we do not check our reason at the door, but at the

⁴⁸ Cf. Matthew 28:20

⁴⁹ Samuel J. Stone, *The Church's One Foundation*

⁵⁰ Cf. Psalm 127:1

⁵¹ Cf. Matthew 7:24-27

⁵² Saint Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 103, 2, 5; PL 37, 1353

⁵³ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 8

same time, we must remember that we are talking about a supernatural reality, one that surpasses human reason while at the same time never contradicting it. In a homily to the members of Opus Dei, Saint Josemaría Escrivá stressed this same point when he said, “We need to meditate frequently on the fact that the Church is a deep, great mystery, so that we never forget it. We cannot fully understand the Church on this earth. If men, using only their reason, were to analyse it, they would see only a group of people who abide by certain precepts and think in a similar way. But that would not be the Church.”⁵⁴

The unity of the Church is probably the most visible mark to the rest of the world; it is also what Christ specifically prayed for at the Last Supper.⁵⁵ This unity is especially seen in three areas – unity in belief⁵⁶, unity of worship and liturgy, and unity of government. In every corner of the world, the Church professes the same creed, and the Church’s moral teaching equally applies in Asia, Europe, Africa, and here in the United States. Furthermore, this unity of belief goes beyond any period of time. What we profess to believe is the same deposit of faith in which our forefathers in the faith professed their belief. In our unity of worship, what a wonderful thing it is to be able to go to a Catholic church anywhere in the world and know that we are participating in the same sacrifice of the Mass. Even if we do not understand the words, we know exactly what is happening at every moment. So too, knowing that the Scriptures used at Mass and the prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours are the same every day in every part of the world, we can see where the Holy Spirit is trying to guide the *entire* Church in a particular direction. Finally, the Holy Father (and locally, our bishop) is a great sign and instrument of unity. As servants of the deposit of faith, it is their responsibility to preserve the Catholic faith in its fullness and to hand on (which comes from the Greek root of “catechesis” and the Latin root of “tradition”) the fullness of that faith to each generation.

Yet, it is not enough to examine the areas of unity in the Church. We must also examine our own consciences to see where we ourselves have been obstacles to that unity and where we have failed to witness to the Church’s unity as we should. In general, the greatest obstacle that we present to unity is our lack of charity, especially through a lack of control of our tongue. We can make great strides in witnessing to the Church’s unity if only we were to apply the words of the third chapter of Saint James’ letter in which he said that anyone who did not fall short in speech was a perfect man.⁵⁷ To that end, I recommend that all of you read a short but amazing book by Monsignor Felix A. Losito called *Attaining Heroic Holiness Through Speech – The Saint James Master Plan*. Once we have learned to control our tongue, we will be able to live out the other demands of unity; we will be able to apply the words that are so often attributed to Saint Augustine: “Unity in necessary things, liberty in doubtful things, charity in all things.” This is not to say that there will not be differences of opinion even among those who are

⁵⁴ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 22

⁵⁵ Cf. John 17:21

⁵⁶ Cf. Ephesians 4:4-6

⁵⁷ Cf. James 3:2

members of the Church, but it means that the love of Christ will unite us, and if we are all seeking to live out His holy will, we will grow closer to Him and to one another. To do this, we should also listen closely to Saint Paul's words with which he exhorts the Church in Corinth: "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."⁵⁸

The second mark of the Church is that she is holy. Especially in light of the sins of her children, this is often the most misunderstood mark of the Church. It is important to remember that the Church, as the Catechism tells us, "is essentially both human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation."⁵⁹ With this in mind, how can we properly refer to the Church as holy? Ultimately, she is holy because of her origin and purpose – because Jesus Christ, who is holy and the source of all holiness, is her founder and because her purpose is the sanctification and salvation of all her members. By analogy, if a woman with a large debt were to marry a very wealthy man, not only would her debt be wiped away, but she would share in all the benefits and privileges that had been previously earned by her husband. Even the adoption of her husband's last name indicates how she has now been configured to her husband. From a spiritual perspective, this is what happens in Baptism. Thus, it should not come as a surprise to us to hear Saint Paul refer to the Church as the bride and Christ as the bridegroom,⁶⁰ for we are made holy by the merits of His passion and death; as the prophet Isaiah foretold, "By his stripes we are healed."⁶¹ The Church is also holy because the Sacraments make her holy. Knowing that Christ is present in every Sacrament, and in a special way in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we see that the Church is holy because the body (the Church) and the head (Christ) are always present together. If we become holy through our union with Christ, so must wherever He is present be holy, and that is always in His Church. Finally, the Church is holy in her members who open themselves to God's grace – both canonized and uncanonized saints.

When we see sin – whether our own or that of other members of the Church – we may be tempted to question the holiness of Christ's Church. However, we must remember that sin is the result of imperfections in our human nature, not in the nature of the Church herself. At the same time, we must not disregard how our sins reduce the effectiveness of the Church. How many more souls could be reached, if only we were more faithful? Or, as Saint Catherine of Siena said, "If you are what you should be, you will set the world ablaze." It is not enough to only examine the personal effects of our sins; we must also see their effects on our brothers and sisters. Through each sin, we not only hurt Christ, but we also deprive our neighbor by leading him away from the Church that He established. Do we realize the seriousness of such scandal?⁶² The challenge for the Church in every age is to be faithful to her identity. As my father would

⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:10

⁵⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 771

⁶⁰ Cf. Ephesians 5:23-32

⁶¹ Isaiah 53:5

⁶² Cf. Matthew 18:6

tell me when I had done something wrong, “You are a Dudzinski, and a Dudzinski does not act this way,” so too Holy Mother Church tells us, “You are a Christian, and a Christian does not act this way.” In a similar way, Cardinal Ratzinger writes, “The Church must constantly become what she is through unitive love and resist the temptation to fall from her vocation into the infidelity of self-willed autonomy.”⁶³

The third mark of the Church has to do with the catholicity. When referring to the Church as catholic, we are saying that she possesses the fullness of Christ’s truth and revelation and that she is for all people and all times. We use a small “c” when referring specifically to this characteristic (mark) of the true Church, but it is also true that the only Church that has this mark of being universal, that is, “catholic” is *the* Catholic Church. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith reminds us, “The Church’s universal mission is born from the command of Jesus Christ and is fulfilled in the course of the centuries in the proclamation of the mystery of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the mystery of the incarnation of the Son, as saving event for all humanity.”⁶⁴ In our examination of living this mark of the Church, we must ask ourselves if we are truly living out the universal aspect of our membership in the Church or if we are being congregationalists.

The final mark of the Church is that she is apostolic. By this, I mean that the apostles were chosen by Christ for founding His Church and that the Church continues to be ruled by the unbroken line of legitimate successors to Peter and the apostles. The Church is also apostolic because she professes the same doctrine taught by the apostles. As Pope John Paul II writes, “By Christ’s institution, the Church is its [truth’s] guardian and teacher, having been endowed with a unique assistance of the Holy Spirit in order to guard and teach it in its most exact integrity.”⁶⁵ Finally, the Church is apostolic because she is “sent” by Christ into the world to draw all people to Himself. In examining our living of this mark of the Church, it is necessary to ask ourselves if we have been willing to evangelize others as our Baptism requires of us⁶⁶ and if we have been willing to use all the gifts that God has given us for building up the Church.⁶⁷

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In what ways can I be a better witness to Christ and His Church by more faithfully living out my true identity as a member of the Church, that is, being a witness to her being one, holy, catholic, and apostolic?
2. Do my sins truly sadden me – not just because they hurt me and separate me from Christ, but also because I am depriving my brothers and sisters of the witness they need in order to come to Christ and His Church?

⁶³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 40

⁶⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, 1

⁶⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, 6

⁶⁶ Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14

⁶⁷ Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:1-31

3. Have I applied the words of Saint Paul in the twelfth chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians to my own life to consider how I need to put the gifts God has given me in service to the Church?
4. Do I have such a deep love for Christ and His Church that I want to share it with others so that they too can experience that life of grace?

I FEAR NO EVIL; FOR THOU ARE WITH ME

The Visible Hierarchical Church

“I fear no evil; for thou are with me.” Returning to Psalm Twenty-Three, we need to ask ourselves two questions. First, how does the shepherd’s presence remove fear from his sheep, and second, how does our Shepherd remain with us two thousand years after He walked this earth? For the answer to the first question, we can return to our contemplation of the shepherds of Palestine. When the Psalm declares, “He makes me lie down in green pastures,” it is imperative that we see the preparation that was necessary on the part of the shepherd to make that take place. As people with little experience with sheep, we may not appreciate the rarity of sheep being able to lie down. Unlike other animals, even the slightest little thing will prevent them from getting their proper rest and nourishment. In this context, the Lord’s words take on an even deeper meaning: “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”⁶⁸ But what is necessary for the sheep to lie down and rest? Unless the sheep is free of all fear, free of tension with one another, free of aggravation from flies and gnats, and free of hunger, the sheep will not lie down. Only the shepherd can provide release from these anxieties; the sheep are completely dependent upon his vigilance and care.

But how does the shepherd relieve the sheep of these anxieties? When a shepherd initially works with his sheep, they do not innately trust him, but over time he wins over their confidence by his ongoing care for them. The sheep may not realize all that the shepherd does to make sure predators and other dangers are far from his sheep, but they eventually realize that the shepherd’s presence means that they are being taken care of. When the shepherd is not present, the sheep become hesitant because they must constantly be alert and on the lookout for danger. Even if the shepherd is on the other side of a hill and out of sight for a brief moment, the sheep return to their defensive posture. Because the shepherd is always present, the sheep learn to associate his voice with his care. It is through the development of a relationship with the shepherd that they know it is in their best interest to heed his voice (even though sheep can be stupid and stubborn and they sometimes ignore that voice). Jesus said the same thing about Himself when He said, “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”⁶⁹ When the shepherd is present, sheep are also free from tension with one another because they know the shepherd will not tolerate the stronger sheep taking advantage of the weaker; if two sheep are fighting for dominance, they will usually stop immediately when they realize that the shepherd is present. So too the sheep come to know that the shepherd will apply medicines to keep them free from pests and that, if he is present, more lush pastures are around every bend. The sheep *need* the shepherd to be present, and it is from experiencing his presence that we, the sheep of Christ’s fold, can recite the words of the prophet

⁶⁸ Matthew 11:28

⁶⁹ John 10:4-5

Isaiah: “He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”⁷⁰

But now we must consider the second question – how does Christ remain with us? In my second pastoral letter, I spoke about how Christ is with us in a very real and tangible way in the Eucharist, but that is not the only way that He is present for His Church. He knew that He needed to maintain a visible presence even after His Ascension so that His sheep would graze without fear. For this reason He founded a Church that was not only spiritual but also visible and hierarchical. When we, the sheep, constantly see Christ shepherding us through the pope, our bishops, and priests, we can focus on our spiritual growth just as the sheep can focus on their grazing. Through our Shepherd’s presence, we are sustained in hope, which the Catechism says “is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.”⁷¹

As those who have been catechized for baptism can tell you, we share in the three-fold offices of Christ (priest, prophet, and king) as a result of our baptism. At the same time, it is important to remember that there are several differences between the common and ordained priesthood and that the baptized, who have some share in the priesthood of Christ, can never claim to have no need for the ordained priesthood and the hierarchical Church. In his encyclical on the Church, Pope Pius XII writes that we “must accustom ourselves to see Christ Himself in the Church. For it is indeed Christ who lives in the Church, and through her teaches, governs, and sanctifies; and it is also Christ who manifests Himself in manifold guise in the various members of His society.”⁷² It is these three specific ministries (or *muneris* as they are properly called) that distinguish the ordained priesthood from the common priesthood. We are all called to be priestly people who offer up the sacrifice of our very lives, but only deacons, priests, and bishops perform these duties that are unique to Christ *the head*.

Those who think they can “earn” these *muneris* have little understanding of their nature and even less about their purpose. Such people would benefit greatly by considering the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas who says, “That one person can carry out an act that another cannot does not stem from a difference of goodness or malice, but from an acquired power, which one possesses and the other does not.”⁷³ Christ does not entrust ordained ministers with these *muneris* to set them apart as superior to the laity; rather, they are set apart and entrusted with these tasks for the purpose of serving the common priesthood. In so doing, deacons, priests, and bishops more fully imitate Christ who came not to be served, but to serve.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Isaiah 40:11

⁷¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1817

⁷² Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 93

⁷³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, In IV Sent, d13 q1 a1

⁷⁴ Cf. Matthew 20:28

When we remember that the bishop is the chief person responsible for teaching, governing, and sanctifying those who live in the diocese, we come to appreciate the role of the priests and deacons who act as local extensions of the bishop and who are completely dependent upon him in the exercise of their own priestly ministry. Priests and deacons do not belong to a particular parish; they belong to the entire diocese. Thus, the bishop addresses the needs of his diocese by occasionally reassigning his priests. In this way, the bishop maximizes the gifts and talents of each deacon and priest for the benefit of teaching, governing, and sanctifying *all* the people in a particular diocese and not just those who live in a particular parish. Such change is often difficult for parishioners who have become used to the particular ways of their priests, but we must recall that differences in methods and emphases do not constitute differences in the truths that they teach. Truth does not change, regardless of which priests are assigned to teach us those truths. When there is a change in parish leadership, it is important to have a supernatural attitude that sees these changes as a function of the bishop exercising his office in a way to provide for our education, governance, and sanctification. Through that same supernatural attitude, we can see the various methods and emphases of multiple priests as a whole, united in the person of the bishop. Cardinal Ratzinger emphasizes this unity within the diocese and by extension within the universal Church when he writes, “He [the bishop] embodies the unity and the public character of the local Church that derive from the unity of Word and sacrament, as we have said. He is at the same time the link connecting his Church to the other local Churches.”⁷⁵

As the link between the universal Church and the local Church, the bishop is more than just a “middleman” between the parishes of a diocese and the Vatican. In describing the role of bishops, Ratzinger further writes that the “bishop represents the universal Church in relation to the local Church and vice versa.”⁷⁶ In fact, a bishop represents Christ not only for the people of his diocese, but also for the people the whole world, because the mission of Christ whom he represents is for the entire world. The pope, as successor of Peter, is the only bishop who traces his authority to a particular apostle; as an expression of this universal mission, all other bishops are connected to the other apostles as a whole. When bishops gather together to discuss various issues, they do not act as representatives of their dioceses in the same way that senators and congressmen represent their respective districts; rather, the bishops gather for the purpose of collaborating, even though each bishop and diocese are complete in their own right. At his ordination, a bishop is given his pectoral cross because he is to make Christ the head (in His entirety) present for his diocese; this is a concrete manifestation of Christ not abandoning any of the sheep entrusted to Him by the Father. Given the important role that bishops play in their diocese, the ancient text that contains the teachings of the apostles exhorts: “Elect therefore for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, humble men and not covetous, and faithful and well tested; for they also serve you in the ministry of the prophets and teachers. Do not,

⁷⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 94

⁷⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 99-100

therefore, despise them, for they are the honored men among you along with the prophets and teachers.”⁷⁷

Even though there are over 2,800 dioceses throughout the world, it is impossible for each bishop to be present everywhere in his diocese at once. Practically speaking, in our own diocese, the bishop has to represent Christ for Catholics in 24 counties over almost 10,000 square miles. Bishops have full authority within their dioceses because they have received the fullness of the priesthood through their episcopal ordination, but in order to keep their finger on the pulse of all the parts of the diocese and to meet the needs of all the sheep, the bishop shares his authority with the priests of the diocese. During the Angelus message on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, Pope Benedict highlighted the importance of the ministry of priests when he said, “The priest is a gift of the Heart of Christ, a gift for the Church and the world. It is from the Son of God’s Heart, overflowing with charity, that all the good of the Church comes, in particular the vocation of those men who conquered by the Lord Jesus, leave everything to dedicate themselves entirely to the service of Christian people, following the example of the Good Shepherd.”⁷⁸ In considering those whom Christ calls to represent Himself in the thousands of parishes worldwide, it is important to recall the axiom, “God doesn’t call the equipped, He equips those He calls.” Just as God’s choice of David over the other sons of Jesse defied human wisdom,⁷⁹ God’s choice of the men who will represent Him often does not make sense if we limit ourselves to pragmatism. For this reason, Cardinal Ratzinger writes, “Ordination is not about the development of one’s own powers and gifts. It is not the appointment of a man as a functionary because he is especially good at it, or because it suits him, or simply because it strikes him as a good way to earn his bread.”⁸⁰ Even though it is important for priests to develop their skills to best serve their flocks, the most important thing they can do is to develop a rich spiritual life. Nothing is a greater predictor of the holiness of each parish than the holiness of the priests who shepherd that parish. Parish priests must always strive to maintain the proper balance between action and contemplation that is described in the Vatican II document on the Church: “Rather than be held back by perils and hardships in their apostolic labours they [priests] should rise to greater holiness, nourishing and fostering their action with an overflowing contemplation, for the nourishment of the entire Church of God.”⁸¹ Without taking this proper time for prayer and contemplation, we as your priests would be unable to adequately make Christ present. In a similar way, deacons who manifest Christ to the diocese through their service need this prayer life so that they are Christ’s representatives and not just social workers.

Although the laity are not part of the hierarchy, I would like to take a few moments to stress the ways that you assist us in our mission – first, those who serve in various official capacities at the parish, and second, the laity as a whole who bring the Gospel to every facet of

⁷⁷ *Didache*, Chapter 15

⁷⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, June 11, 2010 (Solemnity of the Sacred Heart)

⁷⁹ Cf. 1 Samuel 16:6-13

⁸⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 115

⁸¹ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 41

day-to-day life. In describing the relationship between priests and the laity who assists us in the parish, the United States bishops affirm that the “priest, the primary collaborator with the bishop, assists him in the work of teaching, sanctifying, and guiding the community of disciples...Lay ecclesial ministers, especially those serving in parishes, look to their priests for leadership in developing collaboration that is mutually life-giving and respectful.”⁸² Just as all priests act on behalf of the authority of their bishop, the pastor is the person ultimately responsible for everything that happens in the parish. As your pastor, I must give an account to the bishop and even more importantly to God for what takes place in the parish. When I assign members of the laity (whether paid or volunteer) to various positions, my responsibility does not diminish. The Vatican II document on the apostolate of the laity emphasizes the point that “the hierarchy entrusts to the laity certain functions which are more closely connected with pastoral duties, such as the teaching of Christian doctrine, certain liturgical actions, and the care of souls. By virtue of this mission, the laity are fully subject to higher ecclesiastical control in the performance of this work.”⁸³

The laity have the responsibility to act in dependence on their priests, and on their part, the priests have the responsibility to care for the spiritual needs of the laity (including overseeing all the catechesis of the parish to make sure all parishioners are receiving the fullness of the truth from all who catechize). The Second Vatican Council document continues, “The hierarchy should promote the apostolate of the laity, provide it with spiritual principles and support, direct the conduct of this apostolate to the common good of the Church, and attend to the preservation of doctrine and order.”⁸⁴ Even laity who do not officially act on behalf of the Church need to remember that they have an obligation as a result of their baptism to form themselves (spiritually, humanly, academically, and pastorally) in order to be authentic witnesses in the world. In describing the apostolate of the laity, Saint Josemaría Escrivá said, “Lay people, too, have a duty to do apostolate: not because they receive a canonical mission, but because they are part of the Church.”⁸⁵ In order to do this apostolate, even if it is not directly at the parish, the laity have a right to holy priests that will spiritually equip them for this task.

Finally, when we see how Christ is present and works through the Magisterium, it is important to see the connection between the local Church and the universal Church. Cardinal Ratzinger illustrates this when he writes, “It [the Latin word for Church] signifies not only the cultic gathering but also the local community, the Church in a larger geographical area and, finally, the one Church of Jesus Christ herself. There is a continuous transition from one meaning to another, because all of them hang on the Christological center that is made concrete in the gathering of believers for the Lord’s Supper.”⁸⁶ As I mentioned when describing the role of the bishop, the parish, diocese, and universal Church are always present together; we belong

⁸² USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 23-24

⁸³ Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 24

⁸⁴ Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 24

⁸⁵ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, xvii

⁸⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 32

to all three simultaneously. All three levels need each other and are in communion with each other; in many ways, their relationship models the uniqueness and unity within the Trinity. The identity of each person of the Trinity is intricately connected with the other persons of the Trinity. By analogy, the identity of the local Church should not be considered apart from its relationship with the universal Church. Thus, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then headed by Cardinal Ratzinger, teaches, “As history shows, when a particular Church has sought to become self-sufficient, and has weakened its real communion with the universal Church and with its living and visible centre, its internal unity suffers too, and it finds itself in danger of losing its own freedom in the face of the various forces of slavery and exploitation.”⁸⁷ There are not many churches; there is one Church, and the universality of that Church extends beyond every division of race or nationality. We must never be so focused on what is happening in Kokomo that we lose sight of our connection with the universal Church (made visible in the person of the pope). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith adds: “From the Church, which in its origins and its first manifestation is universal, have arisen the different local Churches, as particular expressions of the one unique Church of Jesus Christ,”⁸⁸ and elsewhere, “The Catholic faithful *are required to profess* that there is an historical continuity — rooted in the apostolic succession — between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church.”⁸⁹

In conclusion, there is no connection with the spiritual aspects of the Church apart from a connection with the visible, hierarchical Church. What consolation we can draw by seeing how Christ tangibly acts in His Church through His ministers. The words of an early father of the Church speak of the profound importance of being connected to God through the visible Church: “No one can have God as his Father who does not have the Church as his Mother.”⁹⁰

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do I have a supernatural outlook regarding the clergy in my diocese and parish? Do I see my bishop, pastor, and associate pastors as people God has placed directly into my life to teach, govern, and sanctify me?
2. Do I include the priests of my parish, the bishop, and the Holy Father in my daily prayers?
3. Do I avoid speaking poorly of the clergy to whom God has entrusted my soul? Do I also avoid “minor criticisms and complaints” such as complaining about the length of homilies, style of teaching, etc.?
4. How do I respond when I hear others criticizing or complaining about the hierarchy?
5. If a fellow parishioner asked, how would I explain the similarities and differences of the common priesthood and the ordained priesthood? What implications does this have for how I participate in parish life?

⁸⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communio Notio*, 8

⁸⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communio Notio*, 9

⁸⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, 16

⁹⁰ Saint Cyprian, *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*, 6; PL 4, 502

HE LEADS ME BESIDE STILL WATERS

The Teaching Church

Returning to our model of the shepherd and his sheep, it is interesting to note that the shepherd not only must know how to rotate the sheep through the various pastures, but it is also imperative that he knows where the sheep can find water near all these fields and on the paths that lead between these fields. In the desert, if the shepherd does not point out where the clean water is, the sheep resort to drinking anything they can find, even if it is stagnant and full of bacteria and disease. Without the sound teaching from our bishops and priests, we too tend to accept anything that comes our way, including heresy and distortions of the truth. The shepherd leads his sheep to the water they need so that they might live, but he cannot force them to drink. In the same way, those same bishops and priests (and even the lay ministers who assist them) may repeatedly present us with the truth of the Gospel, but it is ultimately our responsibility to drink deeply of the truth presented to us. In the spiritual realm, drinking deeply implies taking in, accepting, and believing that teaching. In the deserts of Palestine, many watering holes are in places that the sheep are too scared or too distrusting to go in. When the sheep refuse to follow the shepherd, even though he is leading them to the refreshment that they seek, he does not give up. Rather, he goes into the well, often getting drenched in the process, to fill his pails and bring the water out to the sheep. Through his efforts, the sheep's thirst is quenched and, over time, they come to realize that it is to their benefit to follow the shepherd to the source of the water. Similarly, as the shepherds of the Church, we constantly teach the wisdom of Holy Mother Church to all the faithful. Sometimes this teaching is met with acceptance, but when it is not, it is our responsibility to go back to those teachings and throw ourselves at the foot of the Divine Teacher so that we can find other ways to present that same teaching in a way that the faithful might come to accept. By seeing us turning to prayer and learning from the Master, the faithful do not only learn the teachings of the Master, but they also learn to turn to Him themselves.

Because God speaks to us through His Church, specifically through the teaching office of all bishops, priests, and deacons, it is imperative that we never let that voice be silent. Christ wishes to speak to all peoples at all times and in all situations of their lives, so it is necessary to heed the words of Saint Paul to Saint Timothy: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teaching to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths."⁹¹

But what is the content of this teaching? It is nothing other than the teachings of Christ Himself. He has entrusted the Church with the fullness of His truth and has deposited it with Saint Peter for the sake of maintaining it through all ages. The Church does not invent these

⁹¹ 2 Timothy 4:1-4

teachings; they have been given to her by our Lord. For that reason, the collective body of teaching is known as the *depositum fidei*, that is, the deposit of faith.

The Church (and even the Pope himself) has no authority to add or subtract from that teaching; to do so would be equivalent to making herself superior to Christ her head. At the same time, saying the Church cannot add or subtract from that teaching does not mean that she cannot apply that teaching to new situations that did not exist at the time of the Apostles. For example, there is nothing in the Bible or Tradition of the Church that says anything directly about human cloning (the technology obviously did not exist back then), but it is still totally within the Church's authority to apply her teachings on the dignity of every human person to denounce this practice as morally evil. The Second Vatican Council stresses the importance of applying the deposit of faith to modern day situations (especially in the areas of morality) when it teaches, "As regards works and institutions in the temporal order, the role of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is to teach and authentically interpret the moral principles to be followed in temporal affairs."⁹²

If the Church cannot add to the deposit of faith, it is logical for one to ask why we see changes like the new edition of the English missal that we will begin using this year. In considering such changes, it is important to understand the difference between official Church teaching which is based on the deposit of faith and the disciplines issued as part of the Church's governance. Changes such as new translations for Mass do not reflect any changes in the Church's official teaching. Belief in the Real Presence and everything else we believe in remain the same. When there are such changes, they reflect the concern of the official teaching office of the Church to make those immutable teachings accessible in a way that matches current needs.

Beyond these changes in discipline, some may question how it is possible for there to be "new" dogmas, like when the Church formally defined the Assumption of Mary in 1950 (a mere 60 years ago). Such changes are not really "new" dogmas; rather, it shows the development of doctrine. The development of doctrine does not mean that it is an invention of the Church; rather, it is a fuller understanding of something Christ gave to her in the beginning. Christ's deposit was so great that it often takes time for us to uncover all of its richness. When we find it, it does not mean that it was not always there; it just means that we finally have discovered it or have matured enough to understand and appreciate it. Whenever the Church formally defines something it has not formally defined before, it always does so in view of Scripture, Tradition, and a long line of teachings from the popes. Using the example of the Assumption, we see that there are definitely Scriptural foundations for this teaching and the doctrine is consistent with everything from Tradition and teachings of previous popes. The only thing that really changes is what happens as a result of our disobedience to that teaching. Faithful Catholics accepted the teaching of the Assumption even before 1950, but after the official declaration, to deny that

⁹² Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 24

teaching officially puts one in opposition to the Church. The same is true with the development of all doctrines.

In today's society, where truth always seems to be determined by what people feel comfortable submitting to, the notion of an authoritative Church who speaks of absolute truth and the demands of obedience seems completely counter-cultural. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith describes the importance of transforming that culture and speaks of the danger of doing nothing when it says, "The Church's constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism."⁹³ The only *proper* response to truth is acceptance and obedience, and in relationship to the Magisterium it is important to clarify that obedience is the proper response regardless of the "level" of the Magisterium teaching. Ecumenical councils (there have only been twenty-one of these in the history of the Church) and *ex cathedra* statements (there have only been two such formal statements since being officially defined at the First Vatican Council) are rare means that the Church uses to present her teachings, and thus, are known as part of the extraordinary Magisterium. Most people have little problems submitting in obedience to these teachings. On the other hand, the day-to-day teachings of the Magisterium, or the ordinary Magisterium, also require the obedience of the faithful. The same Holy Spirit guarantees the infallibility of each statement dealing with faith and morality. It is not enough to be obedient to the Church's teaching not to kill; a faithful Catholic also obeys the ordinary Magisterium teaching about not using contraception. Because it is difficult to obey a teaching if we do not know it, I cannot stress enough the importance of being familiar with the content of encyclicals and other Church documents, even if it is necessary to read secondary sources which make those teachings understandable for the average parishioner (although reading the primary sources is always preferred if you are able to do so). If we hear a teaching from our bishop or pastor that does not make sense to us or that we personally disagree with, it is important to know the appropriate way to respond – in obedience and by seeking to understand that teaching in light of the entire deposit of faith.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How knowledgeable am I about the official teachings of the Church?
2. What can I do to stay current about teachings of the ordinary Magisterium (not only from the pope, but also from our bishop and pastor)?
3. Are there Church teachings that I have not been obedient to, such as the teaching about the use of contraception? What do I need to do (in my prayer life, in my study of Church teaching, in my general disposition towards the Church) in order to stop rationalizing and to submit to the wisdom of Mother Church?

⁹³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, 4

THY ROD AND THY STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME

Authority in the Church – Teaching & Governing

“Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” When we hear these words, we must ask ourselves what it is about a rod and a staff that would cause us to draw comfort from them. How does the Good Shepherd use these two instruments to tend to His sheep? When we consider the simplicity of shepherds in the Middle East and their tendency to carry a minimum of equipment, we see how special the rod and staff actually are. Besides his own food, water, and a little first aid equipment, these are the only tools he carries. Let us examine each of these instruments and see how they parallel the crosier entrusted to a bishop during his episcopal ordination.

The rod is one of the main instruments of defense at the shepherd’s disposal. The shepherd chooses a stick and carves it himself to fit his particular hand. In the same way, our bishops use the means of teaching and governing that best match the gifts and talents that God has given them and that best fit the needs of the diocese. Each bishop is unique – I am sure we will see differences in the shepherding style of Bishop Higi and our new bishop, Timothy Doherty, but God tailors His care for each of us through the shepherds that He places over us. Once a shepherd has carved his rod, he practices using it on a daily basis so that he is ready to use it when there is the greatest need for it. Similarly, at his ordination, a bishop is exhorted to use the rod entrusted to him when the consecrating bishop says, “Receive the Gospel and preach the Word of God with unfailing patience and sound teaching.”⁹⁴ Through his preaching at daily Mass and at other opportunities, the bishop (and by extension, the priests and deacons connected to his ministry) exemplifies the teaching office of Christ which Saint Paul spoke about in a letter to Timothy, an early bishop of the Church: “Preach the Word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.”⁹⁵ So much of what a shepherd does with his spear is in defense of himself and his sheep. If an attack by a wild animal or thief is a long way off, a shepherd can throw his rod like a spear to thwart the attack before it even begins; thus, the shepherd is constantly vigilant for anything that might harm his sheep. Likewise, bishops (and priests and deacons who have been entrusted with a particular part of a flock) are always on guard to see the ways that Satan wishes to destroy the faithful. By drawing the faithful’s attention to Satan’s tactics and the particular ways the world is trying to undermine Christian values, our shepherds send a preemptive strike that helps us build up our defenses through prayer and growth in virtue. Although it is primarily used for those who are enemies of the sheep, the shepherd’s rod is also used to correct wayward sheep – those getting into danger, wandering off, or attacking each other. Although it is painful to the sheep at the time, such correction is always in its best interest, and a shepherd who fails to use his rod for correction has no real love for the sheep. In the same manner, the Magisterium, as the official teaching office of the Church, must sometimes exercise its office to correct wayward men and

⁹⁴ From the *Rite of the Ordination of Bishops*

⁹⁵ 2 Timothy 4:2

women – clergy and laity alike – and such correction is how Mother Church shows her love for her children.⁹⁶ Even if a son or daughter does not recognize it at the time, the shepherd’s rod provides comfort because it keeps the sheep from confusion amid chaos. At the same time, the rod is not just a symbol of his strength, power, and authority, but also his love. As each sheep returns from the pasture to the safety of the fenced-in enclosure, the shepherd uses the rod to thoroughly look over each sheep individually; as he makes sure that each sheep is accounted for, he inspects it for hidden problems that lie below the surface of the wool. We see the parallel of this each time we “pass under the rod” of the confessional. As we return to the safety and security of the Church, the priest hears our sins and helps us to examine the root causes so that we might remove those things from our lives. Thus, the power given to priests to loosen and bind⁹⁷ is an expression of our shepherds’ care for us, rather than a flippant exercise of power.

In contrast, the staff is an instrument that the shepherd primarily uses in providing for the needs of the sheep. This staff is what identifies the shepherd as a shepherd because it is the tool exclusively of those who tend sheep. Likewise, the bishop’s crosier (staff) specifically identifies who he is; thus, at the ordination of a bishop, the principal consecrator says, “Take this staff as a sign of your pastoral office: keep watch over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has appointed you to shepherd the Church of God.”⁹⁸ Just as a shepherd specifically shapes his rod, so too he shapes his staff to fit him perfectly.

One of the main uses of the staff is at the time of lambing. Many ewes get separated from their lambs during the very stressful time of their birth. If it were not for the shepherd’s care, the ewe would not be able to care for her lamb; at the same time, while assisting the ewe, the shepherd must avoid touching the lamb so that he does not leave his scent on it (thus making the mother reject it). So too bishops and priests use their teaching office and authority to assist parents in the very difficult task of rearing their children. So much of a priest’s work is to form parents so that they are empowered to be the primary educators of their children⁹⁹ as God has created them to be. The priest (and the parochial school) *assists* the parents rather than taking over for them, just as the shepherd avoids touching the lambs.

Another use of the staff is for the shepherd to draw shy and timid sheep close to himself so that he can provide for their care. This is where we see the real pastoral care of our bishops and priests who do not just callously preach the Gospel, but who present it in such a way so as to attract us to be faithful to it.¹⁰⁰ The shepherd also uses his staff to rescue sheep who have fallen down cliffs or into rivers. So too the Church, through her constant teaching and governing, seeks out the lost sheep to return them to the fold.

⁹⁶ Cf. Proverbs 13:24

⁹⁷ Cf. Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18

⁹⁸ From the *Rite of the Ordination of Bishops*

⁹⁹ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3

¹⁰⁰ Cf. 1 Timothy 5:1-2

Finally, as the sheep go from place to place, the shepherd also uses his staff to apply pressure with the tip and to guide the sheep; when they feel this pressure, they are secure that they are going in the right direction. Such pressure to go in the right direction is actually an expression of a shepherd's special love for one of his sheep, because even if the sheep are already going in the right direction, the constant pressure on a sheep the shepherd is particularly fond of lets it know that it is not only going in the right direction, but that it is close to the shepherd. Thus, we see the reasons that our priests and bishops continue to apply pressure on us to constantly grow in holiness, regardless of where we currently are in our journey. That pressure is the tension we feel between where we are and where God is calling us to be. Because that pressure encourages us to change for the better, we come to realize that it is a good thing for our priests to make us feel somewhat uncomfortable in the current state of our spiritual lives. They do not apply so much pressure that we cannot advance, but just enough to guide us along the way. We can also see that the pressure is a mark of our priests' love for us because what they are pressuring us to is the fullness of the Gospel which must be fully integrated in our lives. Thus, as Cardinal Ratzinger writes, "Only the unity of the Church's faith and her authority which is binding on each member, assures us that we are not following human opinions and adhering to self-made party groupings."¹⁰¹ Therefore, we can see that the governing and teaching that come to us from the care of our shepherds are not meant to be infringements on our freedoms, but instruments of care so that we might experience the fullness of freedom that only comes by living the fullness of truth. As Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."¹⁰² Saint Josemaría Escrivá also describes our search for that loving shepherd who guides us to all truth when he says, "Now as well, at a time in which confused voices are rending the Church, many souls are going astray because they do not find good shepherds, other Christs, who would guide them to the Lord of Love. They find, instead *thieves and robbers* who come to *steal and kill and destroy*."¹⁰³ Our priests, as spiritual shepherds applying pressure on us, are only guiding our souls to a deeper communion with our loving God, which is ultimately what is best for us.

In further considering the rod and staff of the shepherd and the way the Church governs and teaches, it is also important to remember that the shepherd is with his sheep in the world. There is nothing foreign to him – wherever the sheep are, that is where the shepherd is. When the shepherd is tending the sheep he always takes in consideration where the sheep are and what they need there. So too our bishops and priests always consider where we are in our spiritual journey so as to determine how best to provide for our needs. The shepherd does not care for his sheep only at the homestead; actually, the shepherd is with his sheep more out in the world than on the homestead. They only go to the homestead to be nourished during the rough winter so that they can go out into the world again in the spring. So too we are, from a physical time perspective, in the day-to-day world more than we are at the church, but the Church does not

¹⁰¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 163

¹⁰² John 8:32

¹⁰³ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 1

stop caring for us when we walk out the doors after Mass. For this reason, the Church also provides us with her social justice teaching and principles for living our lives as laity in the world.

In my first pastoral letter, I condensed the Church's social justice teaching into a short document so that it was readily accessible for you, who have been entrusted to my shepherding care. As I said then, part of the Church's treasury is her social teaching; it is a gift of the Church to her children that can help us understand the difficult social questions of our time. As your pastor (entrusted with the rod and the staff through my ordination), it is my responsibility to guide you and present you with the truth of the Gospel, so that by applying it correctly, you might live out the lofty vocation to which God calls you – a life of holiness and love. He calls each of us to be His saints! Proclaiming the Gospel requires placing the Gospel message in the context of social realities¹⁰⁴, and the new evangelization “must include among its essential elements a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine.”¹⁰⁵

Even in the time since my first pastoral letter, Satan has made great strides in trying to separate the faithful from the fullness of the truth. His lies about the Church having no authority in these matters of daily life have led many to go astray, just as the sheep who wanders away from the shepherd puts itself in peril. The Church reminded us of these dangers of compartmentalizing our lives when she says, “This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age... Therefore, let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation.”¹⁰⁶ A proper response of faith to integrate our secular lives with our religious lives leads us to heed the words of Saint Paul – that we need to subject *all* things (both spiritual *and* secular) to Christ.¹⁰⁷ It is only when we allow Him to teach us and govern us in all the areas of our lives that we will find our true happiness that only comes from being faithful to His will.

In considering all these areas, I must again remind you that the Church does and should have a voice in the political arena. Inevitably, every time that I speak about the Catholic principles which must govern our participation in the political process, someone will say something to me about being partisan or about the Church putting its nose where it does not belong, but I invite you to go back and read or listen to what I said two years ago (as well, go back and read the various Church documents of the 20th century). You will see that the Church's message has never changed. Sometimes the Democratic Party is more in line with that message

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 526.

¹⁰⁵ Centesimus Annus, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 43

¹⁰⁷ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:27-28

and sometimes the Republican Party is more in line, but the Church remains firm – she preaches the truth in season and out.¹⁰⁸

It is important to see that the Church’s authority includes her ability to govern and not just her ability to teach. It is completely appropriate and within her realm of authority for the Church to determine the rules for her discipline and governance. Think about the difference between two parents – neither parent can change the truth about what constitutes moral behavior in their children, but it is left to the discretion of the parent for how to best bring about moral behavior in their children. Last year, when there was a change in discipline (removing the sign of peace and Communion under both species during the flu outbreaks), I witnessed people responding to the Church’s governing authority in various ways – some good and some bad. There might be a tendency to become cynical if we have experienced many changes in discipline (Communion procession from the back, language changes in the prayers, changes in translation, etc.), but we must strive to respond with joy and obedience to each successive act of governance from the Church (both on a universal level as well as on a diocesan or parish level). Joy is an important part of our response to these changes, even though change is always difficult. In some ways, local changes are even more difficult to assimilate than more sweeping changes because we sometimes have the attitude that we have been here before the current pastor and we will be here after he leaves, so why change the way we have always done things? When there are changes based on governance, we must respond either by being motivated by a love for Christ or by avoiding acting in subversive ways to undermine the change. Disengaging ourselves from parish life and hoping that the change will just go away on its own is not the proper response either. When we know something is God’s will for us, we must cooperate with it as Christ Himself always did. In a conference to her spiritual daughters, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton teaches that the first rule of Christ’s life was always “to do his Father’s will”, and she describes what this responsibility looks like for us: first, we must do the will of God, which we discover through those who direct us; secondly, “to do it in the manner he wills; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will.”¹⁰⁹

In the title of this chapter, I indicated that authority in the Church is not just about governing, but it is about teaching. It is not about ruling over the sheep, but rather about providing for all of their needs. The shepherd who is given the task of providing for those needs does not assume authority on his own. Someone must be entrusted with authority in order to have it legitimately. We see this concretely when the bishop confers holy orders upon a new deacon or priest, and we also see it when a priest responds to the pope’s request to be ordained a bishop. To illustrate this point with an example, if someone on the street were to tell your children what to do, they would not have to listen to him, but if you have chosen that same person as a babysitter for your children, you have entrusted him with your authority and your

¹⁰⁸ Cf. 2 Timothy 4:2

¹⁰⁹ *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Advent to Christmas Season, 1689

children would have to listen to the babysitter. And yet, no one would ever confuse you with the babysitter, and the babysitter certainly would not supplant your authority.

Here in Kokomo, I have been entrusted with this authority first by Bishop Higi and then by his successor Bishop Doherty to provide for your care. Having that authority does not make me superior to you, but God has given it to me so that I can be a servant of the servants of God and govern and teach you so as to get you safely to your eternal destination – heaven. We see the same thing in the person of Saint Joseph, patron of the universal Church. Certainly Jesus as God and Mary as the only other sinless human could be described as superior to Joseph in some ways, but at the same time, we know that God placed Joseph at the head of the Holy Family and that He entrusted him with the necessary authority to teach and govern that family. We see that even Jesus went down to Nazareth and was obedient to His parents,¹¹⁰ even though He was their Creator and God.

But some may ask if the authority of the Church is null and void in light of the sex scandal and other such issues. The important thing to remember is that the authority of the message is not dependent upon the instrument God chooses to give that message. If a convicted felon were to be the one who was telling you that two plus two equals four, it would be just as true as if someone else were to be the instrument who imparted that truth to you. But make no mistake about it, even though the holiness of the instrument does not have an impact on the truth of the message, it does influence our willingness to encounter and accept that message. We see this played out in our day-to-day lives all the time. Are you not more likely to listen to someone dressed in a shirt and tie who acts professionally than to someone who looks like a slob and acts rudely? The witness of the person bearing the message definitely has an impact on those hearing the message. Sometimes, the witness of the person may be so poor that you never hear the message they have because you are too distracted by their meager witness. But we must remember that this poor witness never changes the truth of the message. Even amidst horrible things like the sex scandal, it is important to recall that “the original and constitutive holiness of the Church can be hidden – but never destroyed since it is indefectible.”¹¹¹ In the two thousand year history of the Church, there has been plenty of corruption and scandal, but Christ is still with His Church. If He were not, it certainly would have ceased to exist many years ago. It is imperative that we realize how Satan works – he wants us to focus on the instrument instead of the message and the author of that message. Because of these horrible things, he tempts us to dismiss what God is telling us through His priests. We must be on guard against Satan’s lies so that we do not disregard the truth that comes from Almighty God, or to quote a well-known proverb, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

In considering the dual reality of the gift Christ gives us through the teaching and governance of priests and the humanity and sinfulness of those same priests, it is beneficial to

¹¹⁰ Cf. Luke 2:51

¹¹¹ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 6

reflect upon the words of Pope Benedict as he brought a formal close to the Year for Priests. On the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, he said, "Had the Year for Priests been a glorification of our individual human performance, it would have been ruined by these events [the sex scandal]. But for us what happened was precisely the opposite: we grew in gratitude for God's gift, a gift concealed in 'earthen vessels' which ever anew, even amid human weakness, makes His love concretely present in this world. So let us look upon all that happened as a summons to purification, as a task which we bring to the future and which makes us acknowledge and love all the more the great gift we have received from God. In this way, His gift becomes a commitment to respond to God's courage and humility by our own courage and our own humility."¹¹² Truly, the teaching and governance that comes to us from the hands of our bishops and priests is that gift from God in earthen vessels. Let us show gratitude for such a gift by responding in obedience and love.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is my attitude when changes in discipline (Communion procession from the back, language changes in the prayers, removing the sign of peace during flu outbreaks, etc.) are introduced in the parish? Am I joyful and obedient, motivated by a love for Christ or do I act in a subversive way, trying to undermine the change and hoping that it will go away?
2. Do I have a sense of initiative in which I identify needs in the parish and submit my suggestions for improvement to the authority of the pastor who sees the big picture and who is responsible for the care of all the sheep God has entrusted to him?
3. Knowing that Christ preserves His Church and prevents the powers of death from prevailing against it, am I able to see that the authority of the Church is still valid despite the various scandals of some of her members? How do the devil and the world try to undermine the Church's authority through such scandals? What can I do to stand up for Mother Church?
4. What is my attitude towards the social justice teachings of the Church, especially when she reminds us of the principles that should govern our participation in the political process? Am I willing to subject all things (spiritual and secular) to Christ as Saint Paul exhorts in 1 Corinthians 15:27-28?
5. In my relationship to my pastor and bishop, do I live by the principle that it is easier to ask forgiveness than permission or do I seek to have everything blessed by obedience?
6. Am I dismissive of the instructions of our priests in the homilies? Do I dismiss what they have to say because I think they are too young, I am more intelligent than them, etc? Likewise, do I downplay their words since I think they certainly cannot relate to what I am going through in my particular set of circumstances?

¹¹² Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily*, June 11, 2010

HE LEADS ME IN PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Church Sanctifying

Returning to the sheep and shepherd in Psalm 23, we may ask ourselves, “Why do sheep even need a shepherd to find the paths to righteousness and more pasture; could they not use their instincts to find grazing lands and water on their own?” The simple answer to this question is obviously that they cannot. There is a reason that Christ chose to describe us as sheep when He could have chosen so many other analogies. The prophet Isaiah rightly said, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way.”¹¹³ As a result of concupiscence, that tendency to sin which we inherited from Adam and Eve after the fall, our human nature is weakened, and we, like the sheep with poor instincts, need a shepherd to show us the way we are to go. No other domesticated animal requires more handling and direction than sheep. Sheep left on their own tend toward their own destructive habits, and without God showing us the way of holiness through His Son and by extension His Church, we too would quickly succumb to Satan’s temptations.

Often times, it is the shortsightedness and stubbornness of the sheep that is its own undoing. When placed in lush pastures, it becomes obsessed with the pleasures that are immediately before it. A sheep will not leave those pastures on its own even if bad weather or predators approach. Many times, it is so engrossed in one thing that it fails to see anything else. In our own lives, we are often like those sheep – we take good and holy things (like eating or sexuality) that God has given us and we pervert them by not using them appropriately and by not seeing the proper place they have in the greater scheme of God’s plan. So too we can be so focused on good things like our work or even our families that we fail to see the things we must do to grow in the spiritual life. We need holy Mother Church to guide us so that we can sanctify all these parts of our lives by integrating them according to God’s will.

Not only do sheep overgraze on one plot of land unless they are directed elsewhere, but they also, because of their laziness, create deep ruts in the land that they repeatedly walk over. Even when a sheep has completely destroyed one part of the field, it will keep going back there for one more blade of grass, and from the ruts it has made, it will even drink the water that it has infected with its own wastes. Even when a sheep is sickly and near death, it fails to realize how it has done these things to itself. Similarly, we often are our own worst enemies, and we repeatedly place ourselves in areas that we know are near occasions of sin for us. Like that sheep, we often remain on barren land, denying any responsibility for having sinned in the first place, and then reluctant to follow the shepherd over the hill to fresh pastures. We need the Church to lead us from our sin, back to the path of righteousness.

Given these foolish tendencies of sheep, the best thing the shepherd can do is to keep his flock moving. He has a deliberate plan of rotation so that the sheep always get the best that is

¹¹³ Isaiah 53:6a

available at that time. Likewise, the Church has a similar rotation for us so that we are always spiritually nourished. This plan of sanctification is laid out in the liturgical year that moves us through the different seasons and along the path of various feasts and celebrations of multiple saints. There are unique graces available at each step along the way.

The second part of the verse tells us why God seeks to lead us in the paths of righteousness – it is for His name’s sake. God is under no obligation to do what He does. He freely chooses to do so, and thus, we see that He does so solely based on His own goodness. As Saint Paul writes to Timothy, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.”¹¹⁴ For a shepherd, his name and reputation are completely dependent upon his ability to care for the sheep. Although God is who He is independent of our own thoughts about Him, He continues to prove His love for us as He sustains and directs all of His creation. He does this for His name’s sake; in other words, because He is God, who is love.¹¹⁵

The shepherd leading us in paths of righteousness is only the first part of the equation. The Church may lead us, but it is up to us to follow. Allowing ourselves to be led requires a profound humility, which, as many saints have attested, is the starting point for any progress in holiness. It requires us to realize that God (and His instrument, the Church) knows better than I. It also requires that we realize that we cannot become holy on our own. We need the free gift of grace that God gives to us through the Church.

In contemplating the way that Christ sanctifies us through His Church, it is helpful to reflect upon the Third Luminous Mystery of the Rosary: The Proclamation of the Kingdom. The fruit of this mystery is an increased desire for holiness, and the words of the Gospel guide us in our proper response to the proclamation of the kingdom: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”¹¹⁶ The Church, which is the tangible expression of that kingdom, constantly calls us to that repentance and ongoing conversion, for she knows that she and all of her members are always in need of conversion.¹¹⁷ It is her task to motivate us to never be content in our spiritual lives, to desire holiness to such a degree that we constantly live *metanoia*, that we turn away from sin and towards increased fidelity to the Gospel, as we are reminded each Ash Wednesday.

Christ died to sanctify His Church, and the Church is the means *He* established for our sanctification. At the Last Supper, Christ told the future leaders of His Church that they were the branches, and He was the vine.¹¹⁸ Thus, the Church is able to care for the sanctification of her members because she is forever connected to the vine who is all holy. There is no sanctification apart from Christ, and He has chosen the Church as the means for grafting into His divine life. In speaking of the Church’s holiness, Saint Josemaría Escrivá says that “united people, the

¹¹⁴ 2 Timothy 2:13

¹¹⁵ Cf. 1 John 4:8

¹¹⁶ Matthew 3:2

¹¹⁷ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 827

¹¹⁸ Cf. John 15:5

Mystical Body of Christ, extends the redemptive and sanctifying action of the Head to the end of time.”¹¹⁹

If it is the Church’s task to extend Christ’s sanctifying action to the end of time, we must ask ourselves what means she uses for accomplishing that task. As I mentioned in my last pastoral letter, the Eucharist is the surest and quickest path to holiness because it is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of the One who makes us holy. In his encyclical on the Eucharist, John Paul II writes that the “Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*.”¹²⁰ Receiving Christ in the Eucharist does not just impact us for those fifteen or twenty minutes that Christ is substantially present inside of us; it transforms our lives in their entirety and sanctifies even the most mundane activities. By encouraging us to attend Mass throughout the week and not just on Sunday, the Church presents to her children the means *par excellence* of sanctification (of holiness), and through it, we also learn to see the other ways that God draws us to Himself through ordinary events. In the same encyclical, Pope John Paul II adds, “To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. *The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist*; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened.”¹²¹

In being receptive to this enlightenment, it is beneficial to consider the words of the Liturgy itself. By reflecting on the rich meaning of these prayers, the Church draws us closer to Christ in the Eucharist. For example, we can see how Christ continues to work in His Church by examining the Eucharistic prayer in which the priest says, “We offer them [the bread and wine that will become the Body and Blood of Christ] for your holy catholic Church, watch over it, Lord, and guide it; grant it peace and unity throughout the world.”¹²² Again, we see in the Eucharist that the Church calls us to encounter Christ. Through her priests, He is really made present to tangibly and actively shepherd us as He watches over and guides us.

By extension, Eucharistic life above and beyond the offering of the Mass allows us to continuously tap into the graces Christ won for us by His sacrifice on Calvary. Thus, Pope John Paul II accurately says, “The *worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass* is of inestimable value for the life of the Church.”¹²³ By calling her children to deepen their Eucharistic lives, Holy Mother Church is inviting us to a foretaste of heaven in which we experience the reason for our growth in holiness – complete and total union with God. Through the priest, who acts in the person of Christ the head, *in persona Christi capitis*, it is not only the Church who invites us to this union, but it is Christ Himself. Thus, the Church reiterates at the Second Vatican Council

¹¹⁹ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, xvi

¹²⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 1

¹²¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 7

¹²² *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer I

¹²³ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 25

that “Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister, ‘the same now offering through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the Cross’, but especially under the Eucharistic species.”¹²⁴

If we are to understand how Christ sanctifies us through the ministry of the priesthood in service to the Church, it is necessary to see what the role of the priest is. Providentially, last year we completed the Year for Priests in which we focused on that very task. The focus throughout that year was not on the priest himself, *per se*, but on the priest as a minister of service to God’s people.¹²⁵ As such, the “most important part of the priestly ministry consists in trying to get Catholics to approach the Holy Sacrifice with growing purity, humility and devotion.”¹²⁶ It makes sense that the Eucharist and the priesthood would be so connected in our sanctification since Christ instituted both of these Sacraments the night before He offered Himself up as the sacrifice that reopened the treasury of graces that God had in store for us. When the Church aids us in acquiring virtue and removing sin from our lives, she is also preparing us for a more perfect union with Christ when we receive Him in the Eucharist.

Since the priest acts *in persona Christi capitis* in the Sacraments, we can be confident that we are receiving all the graces Christ wishes to give us for our sanctification, completely independent of the holiness of the individual priest. As I said in the previous chapter, the holiness of our priests does impact our receptivity to those graces, but it does nothing to alter the graces themselves. Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches that he “who approaches the sacraments receives the sacrament concerned from the minister of the Church not as such-and-such individual, but precisely as a minister of the Church. Hence so long as the Church suffers him to remain in his ministry, one receiving a sacrament from him does not share in his sin, but shares in the life of the Church who publically recognizes him as minister.”¹²⁷ Aware of the great responsibility that I and my brother priests have to be good witnesses of Christ, it is imperative that I also grow deeper in my own spiritual life. For any times that my witness has not been consistent with the message entrusted to me, I beg your forgiveness. I also pray that my own shortcomings not prevent you from taking advantage of the means the Church offers you to draw closer to Christ. When you experience these things, I invite you to have the attitude of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, who teaches, “When the Lord permits human weakness to appear, our reaction ought to be the same as if we were to see our mother ill or treated with disdain: to love her all the more, to bestow on her a greater manifestation of affection, both external and internal.”¹²⁸ Thus, when you see a lack of holiness in any of the individual members of the Church, the best thing we can do is pray for those members and put into practice the words of

¹²⁴ Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7

¹²⁵ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Priests*, 1990.

¹²⁶ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 47

¹²⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q 64 a6 ad2

¹²⁸ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 8

Saint Paul to the Romans: “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him.”¹²⁹

The holiness to which the Church calls us is not just theoretical; it is a lifelong task that requires a real death to self. It is not easy to be holy. When Saint Thomas Aquinas was asked how to be a saint, that is, how to be holy, his response was simple – will it. Concretely, this means applying the means that the Church provides for us to grow in holiness. If the parish offers all sorts of sacramental and educational opportunities and we hear homilies reminding us of the need of having a daily prayer life, but I never take advantage of any of it, I must not want it very much. Willing it does not mean that I can do it all on my own or that I never fail, but it does mean *daily* denying myself, taking up my cross, and following Jesus.¹³⁰ Holiness is not about doing what I think will make me righteous before God (in the Old Testament, Job was reprimanded for doing exactly that when he made *himself* righteous when he referred to God); rather, holiness requires a docility to whatever God may ask of us.

“As demanded by their common Christian vocation, both priests and laymen, by reason of the one baptism which they have received, must equally aspire to sanctity, which is a participation in the divine life.”¹³¹ This does not mean that we only aspire to sanctity when we are in church; rather, we need to consecrate every moment to the Lord. Often, a short prayer at the beginning and end of each task unites that effort to God’s will. Furthermore, we need to have daily times dedicated exclusively to prayer if we are to let the Gospel message touch those times when we are not on our knees praying. It is also important that we take advantage of solemnities, feast days, and the days dedicated to various saints because, through these events, the Church motivates us to strive for the sanctity to which we are called. These are also great times for us to pass on our faith to our children, as Father Leo Patalinghug describes in his ministry, *Grace Before Meals*. We should not miss out on these wonderful opportunities to experience all the graces Christ has entrusted to His Church.

In addition to the opportunities I described above, I invite you to work on your own spiritual life. Developing the habit of daily prayer (even if it just starts with fifteen minutes a day), rooting out sin from our lives, working to acquire virtues, and frequenting the Sacraments are essential if we are to provide a convincing example to our young people. Without that authentic witness, the catechesis that we pass on is hollow like that of the Pharisees. For this reason, Pope Paul VI accurately said, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”¹³² All teachers of the faith – whether parents or those appointed to positions within our parish – must not only pass on knowledge *of* the faith, but the fullness of the faith as well. **That takes authentic witnesses.**

¹²⁹ Romans 15:1

¹³⁰ Cf. Luke 9:23

¹³¹ Cf. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 21, 2

¹³² Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41

In a bulletin article some time ago, I provided you with a partial list of the many opportunities we have in our own parish for growing in both our knowledge of the faith and, more importantly, in holiness. To that same end, I am putting that list here.

- Adoration 24/7
- Bible Studies
- Bulletin
- Christmas and Easter Book Giveaways
- Couples' Retreats
- Daily opportunities for Confession
- Daily Mass
- Donuts & Doctrine
- Family Initiative
- FIRE Classes
- Frassati
- Holy Family Conference
- Homilies
- Limerick/Voices
- Living Your Strengths
- Men's & Women's Conferences in Indy
- Men's and Women's Retreats
- Men's Groups
- Women's Groups
- Parish Library
- Parish Missions
- Pastoral Letters
- Radio Show
- RCIA (it's open to those who are already Catholic, too)
- Website with links to Catholic resources
- Year of the Catechism

May we all will to be holy and use the opportunities that God gives us here in Kokomo to become the saints God has created us to be!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do I frequent the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist and Confession) in order to encounter Christ through His Church?
2. Do I limit my participation in the life of the Church to Sunday Mass or do I allow Christ to sanctify every day and season by incorporating the liturgical and saint calendars into my daily life?
3. How do I celebrate solemnities, feast days, and the feast of various saints? If I am a parent, do I take particular advantage of these days to pass the faith on to my children?

4. Do I pray for the sanctification of all the members of the Church – priests, religious, and laity? If I have a family, do I teach them to pray and pray daily with them?
5. What opportunities does my parish provide for me to grow in holiness? What obstacles prevent me from taking full advantage of these opportunities? What can I do to overcome those obstacles and help others overcome the things that prevent them from growing in holiness?

MOTHER OF THE SHEPHERD AND MOTHER OF THE SHEEP

Mary, Mother of the Church

In the previous chapters we have examined the life of the shepherd, but now let us pause for a while to consider the life of the shepherd's mother. While her son is off with the sheep, she will not see him for months at a time. The pain caused by being separated from her son is also exacerbated by the fact that she knows the many dangers that her son must face while tending to the sheep. The depth of this pain is great, as any parent who has sat by the bed of his or her sick child would tell you; in many ways, it is easier to be the one suffering ourselves than to watch those we love suffer. When we see the extent of the emotional pain each shepherd's mother endures, we see that it is directly proportional to the love that she has for the shepherd. That means that she who loves most is often subject to the greatest pain when her son suffers. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Mary suffered greatly during Jesus' passion and death, since her love for Him surpassed that of any other human being. We must then ask ourselves, if a shepherd's mother knows that to send her son to care for the sheep implies danger for her son and excruciating pain for herself, why would she ever allow him to go? The only reasonable answer is that she also knows the value of the sheep. Such is the love of the Blessed Mother for the Church, the sheep that her Son shepherds.

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, we have a mother who not only is united to the sheep through her Son the Shepherd, but we actually see her out in the fields with the Shepherd as He cares for the sheep. Unlike the mother of most shepherds who stayed home to care for other affairs while her son was with the sheep, she had to be with her Son and with the sheep. Because of her love for her Son and for the sheep, she subjected herself to all the dangers of tending the sheep. Wherever her Son was, she had to be; whatever her Son loved, she too had to love. For this reason, we see Mary, Christ's first and most perfect disciple, frequently present (in the background) throughout His ministry. But most importantly (as concerns us, the sons and daughters of the Church), she was present at the birth of the Church that took place at the foot of the cross. At the same time, Mary is not only a witness of the Church's birth, but she is also a member of the Church. In describing her unique role, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council teach that "she is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother."¹³³ In other words, Mary is a member of the Church, but at the same time, she is more than the Church because of her Immaculate Conception and her unique privilege of being the Mother of God. In fact, her special role in the Church was planned by God well before her conception in the womb of her mother Anne. In speaking of this role, Pope John Paul II writes that, from the beginning of time, Mary "was thus included in the history of salvation and in the Church's mission."¹³⁴

¹³³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 53

¹³⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, 22

This intertwining of the life of Mary and the life of the Church is no accident. Already in Genesis chapter three (as I mentioned earlier), God is laying the foundation for His Church. In this Protoevangelium (or first Gospel) in verse 15, as God refers to the “woman,” He is not referring to Eve, but to the New Eve – Mary. In the New Covenant, Mary becomes the mother of all the living when she becomes the Mother of the Church, where we become spiritually alive through our baptism. To see the nature of Mary’s motherhood more clearly, we must also consider the relationship between Mary and her Son. Just as in any relationship between mother and child, Mary and Jesus resembled each other not only biologically, but also in their characters. As she trained her Son throughout His life and raised Him, their resemblance also extended to Mary’s holiness, virtue, and even her life of prayer. Thus, it comes as no surprise that this same woman who modeled holiness for the Son of God also instructs us on how to imitate Him. Thus, in his encyclical on the *Redeemer of Man*, Pope John Paul II says of Mary, the Co-Redemptrix, that through “her maternal presence the Church acquires certainty that she is truly living the life of her Master and Lord and that she is living the mystery of the Redemption in all its life-giving profundity and fullness.”¹³⁵ In another encyclical entitled *Mother of the Redeemer*, John Paul II describes Mary’s relationship with Christ and with His Church as a “twofold bond,” which he unfolds as he follows Mary along her own “pilgrimage of faith”¹³⁶ during her life. As we too follow Mary’s pilgrimage of faith, we can more clearly see how Mary shows us, the sheep, how to respond to the voice of the Shepherd and how she, as our Mother, helps us to do so.

As I mentioned earlier, what makes Mary unique from every other human being ever created is the fact that she, through the grace of God, was conceived without any stain of Original Sin. Because she was immaculately conceived, she loved God more than any other human being ever could. How is this so? Because she, being without sin, lived in perfect freedom. Freedom does not consist in being able to choose whatever we want from a long list of options, as our culture and many of us tend to think. Instead, true freedom means to give a complete and undivided “Yes” to God and thus giving of ourselves entirely to Him, which is what we have been created for. And what keeps us from saying “Yes” to God? Our sins. As we know from our day-to-day experience, our hearts are divided due to our sinful nature. Although we may love God and desire to do His will, even the best of us do not always say “Yes” to God because of the stain of Original Sin. However, Mary was truly free because she was sinless. So, when the Archangel Gabriel asks her at the Annunciation if she will be the mother of Christ, she can freely and completely say, “I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”¹³⁷ In this fiat, Mary has the *ability* to refuse God’s request for her, but this ability to choose is not her freedom. Instead, her freedom is seen in her total availability, openness, and gift of self to God as she entirely entrusts to Him not only her life at that moment, but also her soul, her body, and her uncertain future, giving up any plans she may have had for her life. And

¹³⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, 22

¹³⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 5

¹³⁷ Luke 1:38

since she has this freedom to give of herself completely to God, she is able to love Him more than any other human person because love, as John Paul II repeated throughout his pontificate, is giving of oneself to God and to others, which she does more fully than any other human being in history because she is without sin. Not only does this episode of the Annunciation shows us how each one of us should *receive* God's will for us in our lives and how to *respond* to such love, this scene also reveals to us God's great love and respect for humanity. God never imposes Himself upon us or forces us to love Him; He always gives us the freedom to accept or reject His love. And in Mary's pure response to God, we see what our response to God's love for us should always be – an unconditional yes.

It is important to highlight the fact that, when Mary gave her fiat to God in Luke's Gospel, she was not given many details about what her life would be like or how Jesus' greatness and eternal kingdom would be manifest.¹³⁸ In fact, if we read the Gospel carefully, we see that she receives very *few* details. But how does she respond? With full trust and obedience to God's will and care for her. She knows that God is love and desires only the best for her and the world, and so she will always give her "Yes" to God, even when she may not fully understand why He is asking something of her. For example, we know from the Gospels that Jesus was born in poverty in Bethlehem; yet, this seems to contradict what Gabriel tells Mary at the Annunciation: that Jesus "will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."¹³⁹ Nevertheless, she trusts in God's plan and providence and says "Yes" to Him without conditions, even though she may not fully understand why His plans unfold in a certain way. Or, let us jump to the end of Jesus' life and reflect on the scene where Mary stands beneath the Cross. Mary was told by Gabriel that Jesus will be "great"; now, here He is, nailed to a Cross, suffering such a humiliating and painful death. And yet, Mary knew that the Cross, for whatever reason, was God's will, and she accepts and openly receives it, trusting, without any doubt, in God's promise to her and to all of Israel, even though it is a fiat filled with great sorrow and pain. Here, John Paul II writes of Mary, "How great, how heroic then is the obedience of faith shown by Mary in the face of God's 'unsearchable judgments'! How completely she 'abandons herself to God' without reserve, offering the 'full assent of the intellect and the will' to him whose 'ways are inscrutable' (cf. Rom. 11:33)!"¹⁴⁰

It is only in the light of the Resurrection that the Cross is seen in its full meaning and that the entirety and beauty of God's promise that He revealed throughout salvation history in the Protoevangelium, the Old Testament, and to Mary at the Annunciation is understood in its fullness. The New Creation has come and the New Covenant has begun; Christ now brings life to all people who believe in Him and return love for love. And yet, this beautiful story and reality would not have happened without Mary's unconditional "Yes" to God, a "Yes" she

¹³⁸ Luke 1:32-33

¹³⁹ Luke 1:32-33

¹⁴⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 18

continued giving Him throughout her life, even in the moments when she did not understand why He was asking certain things of her. But, by her faith, hope and charity in embracing and receiving God's love and will for her, Christ has come into the world and redeemed us, promising us eternal life, love and freedom with Him in heaven. Just as Mary brought Christ to the world, we too are called to imitate her openness, availability and love for God so we may too be in heaven with Christ and bring Christ to others. And, one way we receive and respond to God's great love for us is through loving and obeying our Holy Mother Church, which we have been reflecting on throughout this letter. Christ shepherds us through the Church and we must be open and respond to His love, even when we may not understand why the Shepherd is asking something of us or leading us a certain way. Through Mary's example in her pilgrimage of faith, we see who we are called to be – persons who receive God's love and will for us and responding to that love with our whole selves, and thus bringing Him to others. It is this mystery of Mary's fiat, her total and heartfelt response to God's love, that Cardinal Ratzinger writes is the heart of the Church and all her members.¹⁴¹ Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar affirms this as well, writing that Mary gave her fiat "in its purity for us all, so that we too as disciples might become brothers, sisters, and mothers of Jesus, who do the will of the Father...every man who receives faith, that is to say, who receives the living word of God in his soul, must without reserve put his whole existence, body and soul, at God's disposal, must bear witness to existence, body and soul, at God's disposal, must bear witness to the word of God with his whole physical life, and must ultimately be prepared to die for it."¹⁴²

Although we are all called to imitate Mary as we give our own personal fiat to God, we should also look to Mary for assistance. Because of our sin, we do not live in the perfect freedom that Mary did; on the contrary, we need a lot of help! Thankfully, Christ has given us Mary as our spiritual mother to help us imitate her virtues and her complete openness to the will of God. Since Mary has the unique privilege of being without sin and being the Mother of God, she is, although a creature like us and a member of the Church, more than the Church. Being the Mother of Christ, she is also Mother of the Church. As mentioned earlier, Christ and the Church are one Body; Christ is the head and the Church is His mystical body. The union between the head and body is so essential that a body separated from its head ceases to have life. The two act together as one. In many ways, it parallels that union between Christ's divinity and His humanity. Therefore, it is quite appropriate to apply what the Council Fathers at Ephesus said about Mary being the Mother of God to understand how Mary is the Mother of us. The Council Fathers made it clear that Mary did not just give birth to the human nature of Christ, but because His human and divine natures were intimately united in the *person* of Jesus Christ, it is completely appropriate to refer to Mary as the Mother of God. So, because of the union between Christ and the Church which came forth from His pierced side – which is to say, because we, the

¹⁴¹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole" in *Mary – The Church at the Source*, 27

¹⁴² Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Marian Principle" in *Elucidations*, 71

Church, are sacramentally, symbolically and literally the Body of Christ – Mary is our Mother too. Mary did not give birth just to Christ the head, but to the entire mystical body of Christ.

If Mary's motherhood of the Church is so foundational to who Mary is for the Church, it is only appropriate that we ask *when* she became the Mother of the Church. The rich Tradition of the Church has always looked at those tender words from the Gospel of John as an indication of that defining moment: "Woman behold your son...son behold your mother."¹⁴³ Jesus' gift of His Mother to us is an expression of His great love for us. Imagine a different situation in which a relative were to pass away and leave his infant children to you. The parents who had written the will that way had done so for the benefit of the children, believing that they would be taken care of. For the person now responsible for the children, they are taking on a lot of responsibility, often at great material and emotional costs to themselves. So too Mary became our mother at no small cost to herself. Therefore, Pope Pius XII writes that "she who, according to the flesh, was the mother of our Head, through the added title of pain and glory became, according to the Spirit, the mother of all His members."¹⁴⁴

Even though Mary gave birth to Christ without the pain normally associated with childbirth, she did endure great pain in giving birth to us – the pain of seeing her Son die on the cross, and at the same time knowing that it was due to the sins of the sons and daughters that her dying Son had just entrusted to her. What could compel Mary to accept that role of motherhood of us? The answer obviously is twofold – love for her Son and love for us. Going back to the example of the husband and wife who take in the children of a relative, we can see where that has to be the case. What couple would take in the children of someone that they did not have a special relationship with? At the same time, is not that couple motivated by love of the children in seeing their helplessness and need for someone to provide for them? Do we not see that this is the same tenderness which the Blessed Virgin Mary shows us? Thus, Pope John Paul II teaches, "The special characteristic of the motherly love that the Mother of God inserts in the mystery of the Redemption and the life of the Church finds expression in its exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him."¹⁴⁵ Mary was not just close to us during the time that her Son was on earth; she remains close to us and continues to shower us with her love.

We can again turn to the Gospel account to see how this love of the Blessed Virgin Mary is concretely expressed. There is a lot of meaning in that one simple line: John took her into his home.¹⁴⁶ Notice that she entered intimately into John's life, where he was already at. Mary did not take John into her home, but rather, she was there present in his home. Imagine what John learned about the Master there at the foot of His mother. As is always the case, the mother who knows all of her children so deeply is the one most equipped to help her children to know one

¹⁴³ Cf. John 19:26-27

¹⁴⁴ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 110

¹⁴⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, 22

¹⁴⁶ Cf. John 19:27

another. Thus, it is because of the Church's connection to Mary that we can come to know so much more about her Son.

Even after Jesus' Ascension into Heaven, we see that Mary continued her mothering of the early Church; she had not taken Jesus' words from the cross lightly. Thus, the mother gathered her children around her as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the infant Church. In understanding Mary's motherly affection in those first days of the Church, it is also important to see where she took the disciples after the Ascension: to the Cenacle, the place where Christ had instituted the Eucharist. She brought the apostles there to encounter Jesus in the Eucharist. There also, in being united to them in prayer, she was preparing them to be docile to the Holy Spirit who would come to guide the Church at Pentecost. Mary is indeed the spouse of the Holy Spirit, and the Church is called to have a similar relationship with this Third Person of the Trinity. By following the example of Mary, we too can learn to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and say "fiat" to whatever the Spirit may ask of us, especially within the guidance and authority of the Church, which we believe is guided by the Holy Spirit. In reflecting upon the image of Mary surrounded by the apostles in the Cenacle, Pope John Paul II writes, "If we wish to rediscover in all its richness the profound relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, we cannot neglect Mary, Mother and model of the Church."¹⁴⁷ In further examining this relationship between Mary and the Eucharist, he continues, "Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist."¹⁴⁸

In all of this, we must notice how Mary acts as a Mediatrix, that is, "one who stands in the middle." Her role certainly does not contradict the fact that Jesus is the one Mediator between God and man.¹⁴⁹ On the contrary, she never makes herself the focal point; rather, her whole existence is about magnifying the Lord¹⁵⁰ so that we might come to Him to receive the graces He wishes to give us. She is constantly leading the Church to encounter her Son and to "do whatever He tells us."¹⁵¹

Knowing that Mary acts as our model, mother, and Mediatrix inspires our hope. She is our model in how we are each to receive and respond to God's great call to love Him and others, even when we may not understand why the Church asks us to love in a certain way. Christ, in His great love for us and knowledge of our weaknesses, gave us Mary as our Mother and Mediatrix who, through her intercession, helps us respond to God's call to love unconditionally with our whole and entire selves. What is more, Mary's role in the Church further inspires our hope in that we see God's plan for the whole Church in what he did in His Mother. Every year

¹⁴⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 53

¹⁴⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 57

¹⁴⁹ Cf. 1 Timothy 2:5

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Luke 1:46

¹⁵¹ Cf. John 2:5

when we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary's Assumption, we remember that at the end of our lives God will also raise us up to be united to Him. Thus, as we read from the Book of Revelation on this feast, we see how the woman clothed with the sun represents not only the Blessed Virgin Mary, but also Holy Mother Church. The hope inspired by these events is not just about some future events; it also encourages us in our day-to-day lives. Thus, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council write, "In the interim just as the Mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come, so too does she shine forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, as a sign of sure hope and solace to the people of God during its sojourn on earth."¹⁵² We need to frequently contemplate the model of the Blessed Virgin Mary to see how we, the Church, can fulfill God's most holy plan.

Finally, in considering the unique relationship between the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Church, it is helpful to recall the dream of the founder of the Salesians, Saint John Bosco. In his dream he saw a man dressed in white who was steering a large ship along treacherous terrain in the middle of a horrific storm. There were rocks on either side that would have splintered the ship instantly, but the man in white was able to steer the ship to safety by guiding it between two pillars – one that represented the Eucharist and the other that represented the Blessed Virgin Mary. Obviously, that man in white is the pope who guides the ship, the barque of Peter, which is the Church, to its heavenly destination. Mary is always with her Son; so, it is only logical that the narrow path that the Church must follow is rooted in the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of the Church's life, and in the Blessed Virgin Mary, who gave the Lord His flesh which He offers to us in that Eucharist. She who provided for her Son likewise provides for us when we turn to her. What pleasure she must take when our requests are for her to help us more closely resemble her Son. We, the Church, should thus turn to our Mother frequently and ask for her intercession in the words of that beautiful prayer composed by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: "Remember O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen."¹⁵³ To these words, we add: Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How is the Blessed Virgin Mary my mother, model, and Mediatrix?
2. How can I give myself more fully to God? How can I better respond to God's love and will for me?
3. How can I be more open to the work and will of the Holy Spirit, which operates through the guidance and shepherding of the Church?

¹⁵² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 68

¹⁵³ *Memorare*, as attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

4. Do I frequently turn to Mary's intercession in my own life?
5. What are the implications of Saint John Bosco's dream for my own life – the dream in which the pope steers the Barque of Peter (the Church) to safety by guiding it between the pillars of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and the Immaculate Heart of Mary?

CONCLUSION – HE GOES BEFORE THEM, AND THE SHEEP FOLLOW HIM

Love & Obedience – The Response of Faith

Recalling Saint Therese’s desire to be a perfect child of the Church and considering our response to Christ’s wonderful gift of His Church, I invite all of you to ask yourselves how you expect your children to treat you. Their obedience to your instructions is a given, but isn’t it fair to say that you would expect there to be more than obedience alone? You would want your children to show you affection. You would want them to share your values, to internalize your instructions to such a degree that they make them their own and govern their lives by those principles. You would know that their love for you was mature and that they were living out every detail of the Fourth Commandment when they reached the point that they knew how you would respond in every situation and they made their choices accordingly. This is what Mother Church asks of us – to love and obey her as we do our earthly mothers. Let us now examine what this response of faith looks like concretely.

The first aspect of such a response of faith that we would see in a mature Christian is a deep and lasting love. Turning again to the example of the family, we see the impact of the love between any two members on the rest of the family. A child who sees his father and mother being affectionate towards one another and openly embracing the sacrifices that love entails develops a deep sense of security and learns to imitate that sacrificial love. So too by meditating upon the great love between Christ, the Bridegroom, and His Bride, the Church,¹⁵⁴ we should not only find our sense of identity and security, but we should be moved to enter into that love through our own sacrifices on behalf of Christ *and* His Church. We must grow in the love of *both*.

The relationship between our love for Christ and our love for the Church reminds me of a man I once knew who loved his daughter deeply. Being a child, his daughter would occasionally get into trouble, but his countenance towards her remained the same, even when he had to punish her. Then one day, his daughter was saying some things that deeply hurt her mother. When the father went to discipline his daughter this time, he was quite upset and even had a tear in his eye. After suffering her punishment, the daughter asked her father why he was so upset when he had never been so when she had done far worse things in the past. The father explained that these unkind words towards her mother were much harder to endure than her previous behavior because an attack on the woman that he loved so deeply was also an attack on him. So too, in our relationship to the Church, we show our depth of love for Christ by the depth of our love for His Church. Similarly, Cardinal Ratzinger writes, “And once again the depth and seriousness of one’s relation to the Lord himself is revealed in the ready willingness to love the Church, to live together with her and to serve Christ in her.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Ephesians 5:25-26

¹⁵⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 130

Showing love towards the Church requires that we respect her authority. “As her children, it is our duty, not only to make a return to her for her maternal goodness to us, but also to respect the authority which she has received from Christ in virtue of which she brings into captivity our understanding unto the obedience of Christ.”¹⁵⁶ Many of us as teenagers might not have appreciated the goodness and love of our parents in the demands that they made upon us, and those requests might even have felt like affronts to our free will – but we also understood the importance of respecting their authority, even if it would require many years of our own growth and maturity to fully understand the reasoning behind their demands. When we did not understand the reasons for what was being asked of us, we had to supernaturalize our motivation and remind ourselves that God’s will for us came directly through our parents. The same is true in our respect for the Church’s authority and our obedience to her. The key principle of authority is seeing God’s will being made known through those He has entrusted with authority. We must come to understand that obedience to the Church equates to obedience to Christ Himself. Furthermore, we must avoid being like the manipulative child who does not get what he wants from mom, so he goes to dad to ask the same question. We cannot say that we do not like what the Church tells us to do, so we will just go directly to God. Just as a child gets identical responses from experienced parents who make sure that they are a united front to their children, even more so we get the same response from Christ and His Church who are united in presenting God’s will for us.

Therefore, we must ask ourselves what this obedience must look like. Certainly there is less virtue in obedience that is lived in a minimalistic way than obedience in which we submit with our whole hearts and minds. In a minimalistic obedience based on fear of punishment, we never internalize the requests of our parents. We do just what we have to, but the second our parents are gone we go back to doing things our own way. When we were teenagers, how many of us did not trust our parents because we thought we knew better and that we were misunderstood by our parents? Such trust is necessary for true obedience. Likewise, our obedience to the Church is based on responding to God who is deserving of all our trust. We would certainly question the love of a parent who whimsically rewards and punishes his child without telling that child the criteria for those rewards and punishments, but that is not the case with God. God takes the initiative and shows His love for us by making His will known to us rather than leaving us in the dark to figure everything out ourselves. “The proper response to God’s revelation is *‘the obedience of faith (Rom 16:26; cf. Rom 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6)* by which man freely entrusts his entire self to God, offering “the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals” and freely assenting to the revelation given by him.”¹⁵⁷

This **full** submission goes beyond the minimum we must do to stay connected to the Church; it requires us to use the faculties of our soul (our intellect and will) for their intended purpose – to come to a greater knowledge and love of God so that we might better serve Him. In

¹⁵⁶ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 92

¹⁵⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, 7

submitting our intellect, it is necessary to acknowledge that God and Mother Church know what is in our best interest better than we do. We must not (out of intellectual and spiritual pride) act like a spoiled child who refuses to acknowledge the wisdom of his or her parents. A child who truly loves his parents will seek out their wisdom and will seek to understand the motivations behind that wisdom. Seeking to understand the motivations is essential if we are to submit our will in addition to our intellect. It is not enough to just agree theoretically with the Church – to submit in our mind but ignore the concrete acts of obedience that come from that obedience of intellect. At the same time, our obedience should not be blind; rather, we should seek to apply our intellect to the task of having the same mind as the Church. “Faith such as this gives us a *sensus Ecclesiae*, an awareness of the Church, and this is something with which the genuine Christian should be deeply imbued.”¹⁵⁸ When we have a sound knowledge of basic Christian moral principles and the reasoning behind those principles, we are able to always act in a way that is coherent with the Catholic faith that we profess. Putting our intellect and will completely at the disposal of the Church is the key to uniting our hearts and minds to the Church and thus to God as well.

Such obedience does not come without a cost to us. Due to the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life,¹⁵⁹ we often imitate the disobedience of the first Adam and find ourselves doing the evil that we do not want to do.¹⁶⁰ Seeing what obedience to the Father’s will required of Jesus who suffered and died for us, it should come as no surprise to us that doing God’s will as presented to us by Holy Mother Church will not always come easy to us. Therefore, Pope Paul VI teaches, “The Christian way of life as set forth and interpreted by the Church in its prudent legislation, demands a not inconsiderable degree of loyalty, perseverance and self-sacrifice. It constrains us, as it were, to take the ‘narrow way’ recommended by Our Saviour. It will not require less of us modern Christians than in the past; it may very well require more. It will require a prompt obedience, no less necessary and difficult now than formerly, but it will be all the more meritorious in that it is inspired more by supernatural motives than by natural ones.”¹⁶¹ So too Pope John Paul II writes, “It is obvious that this new stage in the Church’s life demands of us a faith that is particularly aware, profound and responsible.”¹⁶²

One of the greatest obstacles to the heroic obedience that is required of all the Church’s children is our tendency to see the Church from our own distorted and warped point of view. Satan continues to warp our point of view as he did in the Garden, misrepresenting the fullness of the truth of God’s will for us in order to get us to distrust Him, whose will is an expression of His love for us. When Satan got Adam and Eve to see God as a self-seeking tyrant who cared nothing for His creation, it became not much of a stretch to accept Satan’s empty promises as true, too. When Satan gets us to accept the lie that the Church is merely a tyrant who seeks to impose her will on us, it is easy for him to get us to accept all his other lies that lead us to reject

¹⁵⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 36

¹⁵⁹ Cf. 1 John 2:16

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Romans 7:19

¹⁶¹ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 51

¹⁶² Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, 6

certain aspects of the Church's teaching. If we are to obey with the full submission of our intellect and will, we must seek to see the Church as she truly is, not as Satan, the world, or the media portrays her. To do this, it is necessary to frequently contemplate the foundation, nature, and mission of the Church, and it has been my hope that this pastoral letter would aid you in this contemplation. "Anyone who contemplates her [the Church] with eyes filled with love for the truth, must recognize that, quite independently of those who are members and the ways in which the reality that is the Church is expressed in the material world, she carries within herself a unique and universal message of light, which is liberating, necessary and divine."¹⁶³ By analogy, think about how much our parents seem to grow in wisdom as we ourselves get older. Of course, it is not our parents who have changed, but rather, we have matured. In the same way, it is only when we mature in our faith that we are able to appreciate what the Church truly is. Without that maturity, we try to manipulate the Church into what we want her to be rather than listening to her wisdom that will transform our own lives into what God calls them to be through His Church.

An important part of that transformation is overcoming our tendency to duplicity. How easy it is to leave our faith at the footsteps of the church as we go back into the "real world" after Sunday Mass. Which of you would think you really loved your mother if you were faithful in her presence, and then went against all of her wishes the second you were out of the house and with your "friends"? Our mother the Church says to us, "No my children! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot be like schizophrenics, if we want to be Christians. There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God."¹⁶⁴

Avoiding duplicity also requires that we accept and obey all of the Church's teaching and not just those aspects that are agreeable or easy for us. It is not possible for someone to be a "cafeteria Catholic" and be a "practicing Catholic" at the same time. Being a practicing Catholic requires living the Catholic faith fully. Yes, we all sin and need to be restored to full unity, but there is a difference between falling into sin and obstinately refusing to submit to the authority of the Church. It is necessary to fit our lives into God's will rather than trying to fit God's will into our lives. This requires us to be defenders of the faith – the faith in its entirety, not just parts and pieces. The world is starving for Christ and the graces He has for us in His Church; are we going to deprive our brothers and sisters (and ourselves for that matter) of the fullness of Christ and the complete treasury of graces that He has entrusted to His Church? Saint Josemaría Escrivá writes, "I would say that if all of us loyally safeguarded Christ's doctrine, our numbers would grow considerably, since God wants his house to be filled. In the Church we discover Christ, who is the Love of our loves."¹⁶⁵ Again by analogy, if you were still a child and your mother told you to make your bed and vacuum your room, you would not think you were being a good and obedient son or daughter if you only made your bed and refused to do the vacuuming. Then why

¹⁶³ Pope Paul VI, *Address*, June 23 1966

¹⁶⁴ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 53

¹⁶⁵ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 5

would we respond in such a way to the requests that holy Mother Church makes of us? It is necessary to be obedient to *all* of the things that God asks of us through her.

Another obstacle we must overcome if we are to be obedient to the Church is our tendency to self-sufficiency. Even when we come to the realization that we as creatures have a duty to submit to the will of our Creator, we still tend to think that we can accomplish that will through our own efforts. We eventually must realize our weakness and our complete dependence upon Him to do His will. He calls us to something greater than ourselves, and we can only respond in obedience to that call through His grace. He calls us to be through grace what He Himself is by nature. Therefore, we must learn to turn to the Spirit who helps us in our weakness,¹⁶⁶ and we can only do this if we turn to God in prayer. In relationship to the Church, Saint Josemaría Escrivá adds, “Only the contemplative soul knows how to beat continuously in unison with the whole Church. It alone can sustain fidelity to its own vocation as it responds correctly and precisely to each service it is asked to give.”¹⁶⁷

Prayer is not only a great means for discovering the true identity of Mother Church, but it is also indispensable for showing our affection for her. In the earthly realm, we accomplish the same things when we call our mothers. By calling her, we come to learn what is going on in her life, and at the same time it is a great way to show her how much we love her, since it shows that we are thinking of her. Likewise, we need to include the Church in our daily prayers. The more we express our affection for her through these prayers, the more we become united to her and motivated to be obedient to her. So too, in our prayers, we can ask God for the graces we need to be obedient, especially in the areas in which we particularly struggle.

Psalm Twenty-Three ends with the image of those sheep who have followed the shepherd dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. Likewise, those of us who are obedient to the Shepherd’s voice through His Church shall dwell with the Lord forever in Heaven. Those sheep who are in the Lord’s house and in His arms have spent their entire lives in His care. Because of His constant love, despite illness, pests, predators, weather, and even the valley of death, the sheep have come to love and obey Him who lays down His own life to *actively* shepherd the sheep. Because the sheep *know* the shepherd and are confident in his care, they run to Him at even the first sign of trouble. Saint Irenaeus advises us to run (not walk) to Christ and His Church; he says, “[Those] who do not *run to the Church* deprive themselves of life through evil opinions and wicked working.”¹⁶⁸ I exhort each of you to heed Saint Irenaeus’s words, and that by so doing, you may allow Holy Mother Church to sweep you up in her arms, hold you close to her heart, and protect you from the evil one. May also look to the example of our sister, Saint Therese, and so too become Love in the heart of the Church and be perfect children of the Church. Many of us need visible reminders of what this relationship to the Church should look

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Romans 8:26


¹⁶⁷ Josemaría Escrivá, *In Love with the Church*, 65

¹⁶⁸ Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.24.1, emphasis added

like, so I invite you to gaze upon the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which depicts not only Jesus in the arms of His Mother Mary, but each of us in the arms of our mother, the Church. I pray that we all may grow to be more faithful sons and daughters of the Church, so that through her care and instruction, we too may dwell forever in the Shepherd's house.

May Mary our Mother and Saints Patrick and Joan of Arc our Patrons pray for us!

Given in Kokomo, Indiana on June 29, Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, in the year of our Lord 2011.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Fr. [unclear]", with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Am I indifferent towards Holy Mother Church, or have I developed a sincere love for her?
2. How do I concretely express love for the Church?
3. Have I developed a *sensus Ecclesiae*? In other words, do I have such a sense of the Church that I interpret all of life's events through that filter – that I think as the Church thinks, judge events as the Church judges, and live as the Church calls me to live?
4. In what areas of my life do I struggle to be obedient to the Church?
5. Even in the areas where I struggle in my belief, is my attitude like that of the man who said, "I believe, help me unbelief" (Mark 9:24)?

ADDENDUM I - PRAYERS

Radiating Christ

Dear Jesus, help us to spread Your
fragrance everywhere we go.
Flood our souls with Your Spirit and life.
Penetrate and possess our whole being,
so utterly, that our lives may only be a
radiance of Yours.
Shrine through us, and be so in us,
that every soul we come in contact with
may feel Your presence in our soul.
Let them look up and see no longer us
but only Jesus.
Stay with us,
and then we shall begin to shine as You shine;
so to shine as to be a light to others;
the light, O Jesus, will be all from You,
none of it will be ours; it will be You,
shining on others through us.
Let us thus praise You in a way You love best,
by shining on those around us.
Let us preach You without preaching,
not by words but by our example,
by the catching force,
the sympathetic influence of what we do,
the evident fullness of the love our hearts
bear to You.
Amen.

Prayer for the Pope

Christ, Jesus, King and Lord of the Church, in your presence I renew my unconditional loyalty to your Vicar on earth, the Pope. In him you have chosen to show us the safe and sure path that we must follow in the midst of confusion, uneasiness and unrest. I firmly believe that through him you govern, teach and sanctify us; with him as our shepherd, we form the true Church: one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

Grant me the grace to love, live and spread faithfully our Holy Father's teachings. Watch over his life, enlighten his mind, strengthen his spirit, defend him from calumny and evil. Calm the erosive winds of infidelity and disobedience. Hear our prayer and keep your Church united around him, firm in her belief and action, that she may truly be the instrument of your redemption. Amen.

Litany of Humility

Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val

O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, **Hear me.**
From the desire of being esteemed, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the desire of being loved, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the desire of being extolled, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the desire of being honored, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the desire of being praised, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the desire of being preferred to others, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the desire of being consulted, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the desire of being approved, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the fear of being humiliated, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the fear of being despised, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the fear of suffering rebukes, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the fear of being calumniated, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the fear of being forgotten, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the fear of being ridiculed, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the fear of being wronged, **Deliver me, Jesus.**
From the fear of being suspected, **Deliver me, Jesus.**

That others may be loved more than I, **Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.**
That others may be esteemed more than I, **Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.**
That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease, **Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.**
That others may be chosen and I set aside, **Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.**
That others may be praised and I unnoticed, **Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.**
That others may be preferred to me in everything, **Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.**
That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should, **Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.**

Novena to Saint Peter

O Holy Apostle, because you are the rock upon which Almighty God has built His Church, obtain for me I pray you, firm hope and burning love; complete detachment from myself, contempt of the world, patience in adversity, humility in prosperity, recollection in prayer, purity of heart, a right intention in all my works, diligence in fulfilling the duties of my state of life, constancy in my resolutions, resignation to the will of God and perseverance in the grace of God even unto death; that so, by means of your intercession and your glorious merits, I may be made worthy to appear before the chief and eternal shepherd of souls, Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns forever. Amen.

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