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"They silenced him with a single shot to the heart, but now he speaks to us even more clearly."

Homily at Mass Celebrating 100th Anniversary of Birth of Blessed Óscar Romero

Archbishop Paglia

The archbishop officially promoting Blessed Óscar Romero's cause for sainthood said he hopes the process will conclude within a year and Catholics around the world will honor St. Óscar Romero, martyr. "Keeping alive the memory of Romero is a noble task, and my great hope is that Pope Francis will soon canonize him — a saint," Italian Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the postulator of the Salvadoran archbishop's cause, said in a homily Aug. 12 in London. Archbishop Paglia, in addition to promoting Blessed Romero's sainthood cause, is president of the Pontifical Academy for Life and chancellor of Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family. The biggest hurdle in the sainthood cause was obtaining recognition that Blessed Romero, who was shot while celebrating Mass, was a martyr, Archbishop Paglia said at St. George's Cathedral. Some church leaders, including some who worked in the Roman Curia, had insisted Blessed Romero was assassinated because of his political position. But, Archbishop Paglia said, "The essence of his holiness was his following the Lord by giving himself completely for his people." Still, he told the congregation in London celebrating the 100th anniversary of Blessed Romero's birth, "Romero was not a Superman. He was afraid of dying, and he confessed that to his friends on a number of occasions. But he loved Jesus and his flock more than he loved life. This is the meaning of martyrdom." The archbishop's homily follows.

We are gathered today around the altar of the Lord to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Blessed Óscar Arnulfo Romero. Today all of us here, together with others in El Salvador and in other parts of the world, remember this shepherd for his Gospel witness that brings light to believers and nonbelievers alike. On that long-ago Aug. 15, 1917, God chose the child born that day for a great mission: to prepare the hearts

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of his fellow countrymen to welcome the Gospel of his Son.

As often happens with prophets, Romero paid with his life. His birth, his life and especially his death were all focused on Jesus. He made his own the words that Paul wrote to the Romans: "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life ... nor other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God" (Rom 8:35, 39).

The last years of his pastoral life were guided by those exact words. Pope Francis has made it clear that Romero was persecuted even after his death with the opposition to his beatification that many persons mounted.

But when May 25, 2015, finally came, around half a million people gathered round the altar to thank the Lord for sending this shepherd. And I'll never forget the emotion of that day. At his tomb, just as when he was alive, many spoke to him because they felt he was still with them!

Today, on the centenary of his birth, we remember him still. And we do so beginning with the day he entered heaven. It was on March 24, 1980, that he was assassinated at the altar just after his homily and while he was preparing the gifts at the offertory. They silenced him with a single shot to the heart, but now he speaks to us even more clearly. His death is written in the heart of the 20th-century church. In ages past, only two other bishops met the same fate: St. Stanislaus, bishop of Kraków, and St. Thomas à Becket, archbishop of Canterbury.

I myself remember the emotion of St. John Paul II when he heard that Romero had been assassinated. And when, at the celebration for new martyrs during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, he saw that Romero's name had been left out — that's how strong Curia opposition was — the pope added it, writing that Romero was an example of the shepherd who lays down his life for his flock.

And today Romero's death continues to speak to us in the martyrdoms of the many priests in the Middle East who have been assassinated while celebrating Sunday Mass. Romero was the first in this long line of heroes who died for Christ in the 20th century and in the new millennium. And with him, let us remember all the Christians who continue to bear witness to the Gospel even unto the shedding of their blood.

Keeping alive the memory of Romero is a noble task, and my great hope is that Pope Francis will soon canonize him — a saint! Over the years we insisted on Romero being recognized as a martyr. The essence of his holiness was his following the Lord by giving himself completely for his people. But let's be realistic, Romero was not a Superman. He was afraid of dying, and he confessed that to his friends on a number of occasions. But he loved Jesus and his flock more than he loved life.

This is the meaning of martyrdom. Love for Jesus and for the poor is greater than love for oneself. This is the power of Romero's message. A simple believer, if overwhelmed by love, becomes strong, unbeatable. Several times, to shut him up he was threatened with death, but Romero, following the Good Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep, would not shut up; and when he was advised, even by Rome, to leave the country because the threats had become more direct, he replied, "The shepherd never leaves his sheep, especially not when then they are in danger."

And today Romero repeats in heaven the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper: "When I was with them, I protected them in your name ... and guarded them" (Jn 17:12). Romero died to save his people, to save them from the violence of injustice. I believe that the verse I just quoted was one that Romero often meditated on, just as he meditated on other passages that speak of giving one's life to protect the flock, and before he preached this message to others, he preached it to himself, and he chose to be like Jesus, giving his life for his flock.

For this reason, he could not keep silent in the face of the injustices suffered by the

Blessed Óscar Romero, the murdered archbishop of San Salvador, is a martyr of hope, said Chilean Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati, Pope Francis' envoy to the celebration of the centennial of the archbishop's birth in El Salvador.

Blessed Romero "is a true martyr of hope ... a great martyr of hope," said the Santiago cardinal. "He is so for the continent's poor, he is so for the people of El Salvador, he is so for the hope of our beloved church, for all who struggle for justice, reconciliation, peace and affectionately call him 'St. Romero of America.'"

Cardinal Ezzati gave the homily Aug. 15 at the Salvadoran cathedral where people gathered for a special Mass. He said Blessed Romero's "closeness to the poor ... led him to see, with his eyes, the injustice the peasants were suffering."

Repeatedly interrupted by applause, the cardinal quoted a letter from Pope Francis to the Salvadoran bishops on Blessed Romero's beatification in 2015: "Those who have Archbishop Romero as a friend in faith ... those who admire him, find in him the strength and encouragement to build the people of God, to commit to a more balanced and dignified social order."

"Those words by Pope Francis confirm our intuition that Blessed Romero is a saint of hope," the cardinal added.

Shortly before he was assassinated in 1980, Blessed Romero promised that if God accepted his martyrdom, he would forgive those who would take his life, the Santiago cardinal said in his homily.

He also quoted Blessed Romero's words shortly before he was murdered: "Martyrdom is a grace from God which I do not believe I deserve. But should God accept the sacrifice of my life, that my blood be the seed of freedom, it is a signal that hope will soon be a reality. Should they kill me, I forgive and bless them."

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powerless. He began to denounce them publicly. He did not shirk before the forces of power, and he found his power in the love that Christ has for the poor. It was the Gospel that led him, it was the magisterium of Vatican II and of the Latin American church with its preferential option for the poor. Those who were oppressing the poor did not like the church that Romero exemplified. Indeed, they believed it to be a politicized church.

Romero chose to be faithful to the church presented by the council. He became a forceful witness of its love for the poor, and he gave his life at the altar in union with Christ himself — victim and priest at the same time. A nun who was at that Mass and who saw Romero die before he raised the bread and wine to heaven told me, "That day I thought Romero was, like Jesus, both victim and priest."

The martyr's death that Romero suffered is his most precious gift to us. That gift is especially precious in our days, and the people know it. That's why his testimony continues to be welcomed all over the world. Yes, dear sisters and dear brothers, in a world where self-love and self-preservation are supreme values, where we protect ourselves from others by building walls and barriers both in our hearts and in our relationships, Romero's example is a shining beacon, a light that delivers individuals and peoples from the darkness of egoism.

Romero is speaking to us today, and I can hear the echo of his last Sunday homily:

"In the name of God and in the name of this suffering people, I beg you, I beseech you; I order you in the name of God — stop the repression."

There is too much violence in the world, there is so much violence in El Salvador, where gangs — *maras* — continue to bloody the country. There is violence in too many countries in the world; too many wars. Hunger is too widespread and there is too much injustice to number. Ours is a world of globalized indifference that lets evil reap its harvest of innocent souls, young and old. There is too much terrorist violence that sows death and fear. Today Romero asks the whole world to stop the violence, stop the killing.

Dear sisters and dear brothers, we need a real conversion away from fear, indifference, superficiality, just as Archbishop Romero was converted when he lived through the death of Father Rutilio Grande with his two peasant friends. Romero became a defender of the poor, and we too are asked to leave behind a Christianity that is just habit and self-reference. Today, in our own world, we need a Gospel Christianity that knows how to witness love for everyone, especially for the poor, a Christianity that inspires us to give our life for others.

Romero witnessed to a Gospel and a church that "goes out" to save everyone, no one excluded. It is the church of the Second Vatican Council that Blessed Paul VI compared to the good Samaritan who bends down before the hurts of today's humanity. Romero is a martyr who exemplifies the church that Vatican II wanted — a martyr of the church of Vatican II. And Pope Francis is not just a defender of that church.

With Romero in heaven and with Francis on the chair of Peter, the church goes out of itself and becomes a good Samaritan in the world. We needed a Latin American pope before Romero could be raised to the honors of the altar. I remember the words that Pope Francis said to me when we met on the first day of his papal ministry, March 19, 2013. He asked, "How is the cause of beatification of Archbishop Romero doing?"

Dear sisters and dear brothers. We cannot be disciples who act only out of habit and are thinking only of ourselves. That is not Gospel joy. Romero reminds us of the teaching of Jesus that was quoted by the apostle Paul: "There is more joy in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20:35).

Indeed, martyrdom, giving one's life for others, is the highest way to follow Jesus — and the guarantee of being truly blessed.

Blessed Óscar Romero is a model of a bishop for our times. He is an inspiration to Pope Francis and to all of us Christians striving to follow Jesus faithfully.

Beato Romero — Ora pro nobis.

Blessed Óscar Romero — Pray for us. ■

Homily at Mass Celebrating 100th Anniversary of Birth of Blessed Óscar Romero

Archbishop Gomez

"One hundred years after his birth, Blessed Óscar Romero still inspires us for his humility and courage — for his love for the poor and his witness of solidarity and service to others, even to the point of laying down his life,"

Cardinal Ezzati arrived Aug. 12 in San Salvador to take part in different activities to mark the centennial of Blessed Romero's birth, which included a 90-mile pilgrimage,"Caminando hacia la cuna del Profeta" ("Walking toward the prophet's birthplace"), from San Salvador to Ciudad Barrios, the eastern city where the martyr was born Aug. 15, 1917.

Ordained April 4, 1942, in Rome, the Salvadoran religious leader was appointed archbishop of San Salvador Feb. 23, 1977, and was gunned down during Mass in a hospital chapel March 24, 1980, a day after a sermon in which he called on Salvadoran soldiers to obey what he described as God's order and stop carrying out actions of repression.

The celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Blessed Óscar Romero's birth should be a time to reflect on what it really means to call someone a martyr, said Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez of San Salvador.

Too many people in El Salvador "continue to call martyrs those who picked up arms and died following an ideal" in the country's 12-year-long civil war, the cardinal wrote in an article for L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper.

The country's real martyrs, the cardinal said, "never stained their hands with blood," and they were "men and women who strove to love God and their neighbors."

The real martyrs of El Salvador are Blessed Romero, "the assassinated priests and the four U.S. women — three religious and a laywoman — whose lives were taken in December 1980," he said, referring to Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan, a laywoman.

In addition, he wrote, "we all have a debt that we must

begin to settle as soon as possible. We are obliged out of gratitude to God and love for the truth to redeem the memory of hundreds of anonymous martyrs, most of whom were humble campesinos."

"For us, martyr means witness," he said. "We must walk with them in the name of Christ."

The article by Cardinal Rosa Chávez was published Aug. 10 in the Italian edition of L'Osservatore Romano, but was written for the newspaper's Spanish edition, which published a special issue for Blessed Romero's birthday Aug. 15.

Washington, D.C., resident Berta Quintanilla said her toddler had always asked about the bespectacled older man whose photo he often saw at home and sometimes at church events.

"He wanted to know about him, who he was," said Quintanilla.

Because of the violent manner in which he died in 1980 it was difficult to explain the entire story of Blessed Óscar Romero to young Esau Cruz, now 6, but little by little, Quintanilla began to teach him: He was a bit like Jesus. "He died for us," and "he didn't like injustice," she explained to him.

Quintanilla, who was born in El Salvador, took Esau Aug. 15 to their Washington parish, the Shrine of the Sacred Heart, where parishioners shared cake in honor of Blessed Romero after the feast of the Assumption Mass, which fell on what would have been the Salvadoran archbishop's 100th birthday.

But praise, and even recognition of Romero's holiness by Catholics, was hard-fought, said 51-year-old Maria de la Paz Amaya de Majano, who attended the Washington gathering with her husband, daughter and grandson — all wearing T-shirts with the archbishop's image. In her native El Salvador, it was once dangerous to have anything with his image on

Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez said in an Aug. 13 homily during a Mass celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Salvadoran archbishop. "Our brother, Blessed Óscar, had a vision for a new society — the society that God wants — a society in which God's gifts are shared by everyone and not only the few. We want to carry that vision forward in our own times and in our own society," Archbishop Gomez said during the Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. Italian Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the postulator of the Salvadoran archbishop's sainthood cause, said in an Aug. 12 homily in London that the biggest hurdle in the sainthood cause was obtaining recognition that Blessed Romero, who was shot while celebrating Mass, was a martyr. Archbishop Gomez said, "God gives each of us a mission. It is not just for bishops like Monseñor Romero. Each one of us, in our own way, is called to build the kingdom of God. Blessed Óscar used to say that every person must be a 'messenger' and a 'prophet' for God and for the kingdom of love and mercy that Jesus Christ came to proclaim." The archbishop's homily follows.

Today we celebrate the memory of Blessed Óscar Romero — a proud son of the Salvadoran people and a saint of the Americas.

So today we want to pray in a special way for the great nation of El Salvador and the Salvadoran community here in Los Angeles as we celebrate this important memorial.

One hundred years after his birth, Blessed Óscar Romero still inspires us for his humility and courage — for his love for the poor, and his witness of solidarity and service to others, even to the point of laying down his life.

Our brother, Blessed Óscar, had a vision for a new society — the society that God wants — a society in which God's gifts are shared by everyone and not only the few. We want to carry that vision forward in our own times and in our own society.

So also today we want to ask this great saint to help all of us to live with new faith, new hope and new love. We ask him to intercede for us — to give us courage to continue his project, his "revolution of love."

Our readings today help us to understand our mission as disciples.

We have to think about our lives as a journey.

And this is the image that we have in our Gospel today. Our lives are like that journey across the sea that we see the apostles making in the Gospel.

We are traveling in that boat — just as they were. And the "boat" of course is the church. In the church, we are a family traveling together, brothers and sisters, moving through life in the company of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Monseñor Romero's life was a journey that he walked in the company of Jesus and in the company of his people. And he served his people with a pastor's love, with a father's love.

And just like the disciples going with Jesus in the boat and just like the prophet Elijah in today's first reading, we face trials and storms in our journey of discipleship.

This is true in our own personal lives. And then we can think about the troubles in the world.

We pray especially for those who are suffering violence in El Salvador today — those who are living in desperate poverty throughout Central America and Latin America, especially for our brothers and sisters in Venezuela.

We know that they face these same fears — like Elijah on the mountain; like the apostles in the boat.

But we can never forget that God calls us to come to him and he will never leave us alone in our struggles.

In that first reading that we heard, it was difficult for the prophet Elijah to recognize where God was.

He is looking for God in all the "noise" and confusion in the world. The prophet Elijah faces a wind that is so strong that it rips through the mountains and shatters the rocks into pieces! And there is an earthquake. And then there is a fire!

But God wants Elijah to know — and he wants us to know — that even in all of this chaos, even when the world seems like it is falling apart, he is still with us.

We need to listen for God. We have to have faith and confidence that he is true. We have to find the time to listen to him, and pay attention and trust in him.

This, of course, occurred in the life of our saint. Blessed Óscar walked with his people during this dark time of sorrow and fear — living and working alongside his people, sharing in their struggles.

And he knew that he had to entrust everything to God. We need to ask him today to have that same confidence. We need to follow his example. When we have troubles, when temptations and trials come, we need to have total confidence in God. We will know God's presence and closeness in our lives even in those difficult times.

In the Gospel, the apostles are really scared. The storm is powerful, and I am sure that they were thinking that that was the end, that they

were dying. Even when they see Jesus on the water — they think he's a ghost!

And, my brothers and sisters, this can happen to us, too. We can get so anxious about our future or worrying about the things in our lives that we can think that God is not there for us. But he is.

But our Gospel today assures us that Jesus is always with us, that he is always ready to give us his hand to help us.

That is why St. Peter is a beautiful example for all of us today. He calls out to Jesus in faith, and Jesus says to him, "Come."

And, as we heard today, St. Peter was fine as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus and kept moving toward him. But the minute he looked away, when he thought about his human limitations and all the storms around him, he began to sink.

Then he cries out, "Lord, save me!" Then Jesus reached out his hand and caught him and helped him keep walking.

What a great lesson for each one of us, my brothers and sisters! We need to keep our eyes on Jesus Christ.

Of course, *Monseñor* Romero felt struggles and challenges in his ministry. But he kept his eyes on Jesus Christ. He asked the Lord to save him and to help him so that he could continue in the mission that Jesus gave him.

And that is important for us, too, my brothers and sisters. God gives each of us a mission. It is not just for bishops like *Monseñor* Romero. Each one of us, in our own way, is called to build the kingdom of God.

Blessed Óscar used to say that every person must be a "messenger" and a "prophet" for God and for the kingdom of love and mercy that Jesus Christ came to proclaim.

Let us listen to his words: "Let each one of you, in your own vocation — nun, married person, bishop, priest, high school or university student, workman, laborer, market woman — each one in your own place live the faith intensely and feel that in your surroundings you are a true microphone of God" (M. Dennis, R. Golden, S. Wright, *Óscar Romero: Reflections on His Life and Writings* [Orbis, 2000], 108).

This is our mission, my brothers and sisters. A beautiful challenge that we share together — all of us! To be missionary disciples! To live our faith in Jesus Christ intensely! To be the "true microphone of God" — bringing his word of healing, his word of justice, his word of truth — to every aspect of our lives and the workings of our society.

So also today let us ask this great saint to help all of us to live with new faith, new hope and new love.

In Blessed Óscar's name, let's keep working — to build a better Los Angeles, a better America and a better world. Let us carry the Gospel message of love and mercy, truth and justice into every corner of our world.

Let's keep pressing for immigration reform — to keep our families together, to give rights to our workers and to open the way to make new citizens for this great land of ours.

And on this special day, let us ask the patroness of El Salvador, *Nuestra Señora de la Paz* — to watch over her children in the land that is named for "the Savior."

May she guide them to know the freedom, justice and peace that Blessed Óscar Romero gave his life for.

And let us go to our Blessed Mother. Let us ask her to obtain for us the courage we need to trust Jesus more completely — so that we can navigate on the stormy waters of our culture and lead our brothers and sisters to the shores of eternal life.

Que viva el Beato Óscar Romero! Que viva Nuestra Señora de la Paz! Que viva El Salvador! ■

Trying to Say God

Bishop Flores

More than 200 Catholic artists attended a June 22-24 literary gathering at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, delivered a keynote address on the first day of the gathering, whose theme was, "Trying to Say 'God': Re-enchanting the Catholic Literary Imagination." Bishop Flores explored three ideas: the poverty of the Word, the provocations of the Word and the Word at the edge. He said, "Words are aimed at something more than provoking consumptive desire, just as embodied persons are more than objects of consumptive desire or objects within whom consumptive desire can be provoked. Surely the vocation of a Catholic writer involves contending today with the aggressive reduction of persons to objects and our words to instruments of utilitarian provocation." He discussed deconstructionist literary criticism, noting that "for many literary critics, a literature nourished by a dogmatic religious faith is but a phase that is bound to be superseded by our current happy progression into intellectually uncommitted status. This amorphous critical perspective, which is anything but happy, is actually a mix of hostile aversions to any claims about meaning

it, she said, remembering the attacks on his character by other Catholics. That's why it's always been important for her to tell the truth about Archbishop Romero to others but also to talk about it as a family, she told Catholic News Service.

From a young age, she taught her daughter Vilma Majano about the archbishop, to counter whatever she might hear about him from others.

Now as a family living in the U.S., they often light candles together by an oil portrait of Blessed Romero placed at their Washington parish church shortly after his 2015 beatification. She said she often asks for Blessed Romero's intercession in matters involving the world's youth and so that her native country can overcome violence. She's also teaching her grandsons about his life, how Romero followed Jesus' example.

"He was a great person who left everything behind, everything, even his blood, for the poor, for those who didn't have shoes, those who were hungry," and the poor who were being attacked for the religious beliefs, such as her family, Amaya said.

As a family, they told stories about him after the Mass while remembering his sacrifices.

"The most important way to remember Blessed Romero is to carry on his work for justice. But sometimes it is time to celebrate, which we did today in the context of Mary, whom Romero referred to as the 'ideal of the church,'" said Cinnamon Sarver, one of the event's organizers.

For parishioner Quintanilla, it was another opportunity to help her teach her son Esau about another "great example" of humility and holiness that the church provides.

He was a good example of peace, of faith, of love for others, she said.

"I hope it helps him be nice to others, be humble, be good," like Blessed Romero, she added.

in the world." Bishop Flores added, "Yet there is another way to read the history of literature. If the incarnation of the Word is the intense-most signification of the love unseen behind all that is, then the rejection of this sign was bound to wind itself historically toward the current cultural fear that behind all that is, there is nothing at all. To say it this way puts in high relief where our current contentious edge lies." The gathering was sponsored by Notre Dame's Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, the Sick Pilgrim blog, Patheos, University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto, Image and Our Sunday Visitor. Bishop Flores' keynote follows.

The Poverty of the Word

The Word is our most constant and mysterious companion. In some way we come together during these days to celebrate the poverty of the Word. And this in two principal senses.

We rejoice in the poverty assumed by the Word when he took flesh, and secondly we celebrate that poverty that shows itself both in what we can say and in what we cannot say of him. For in "trying to say God" we encounter all of these poverties and more. By his poverty we are made rich.[1]

The whole Christian life is a participation in the expressiveness of the Word. That the church by grace both engenders and needs artisans of words, painters, sculptors, musicians and other subcreators is akin to an evident truth that flows from revelation. Popes and bishops have written about it, and history testifies to it. I am not interested in mounting an effort to re-present in narrative fashion what the tradition has said before me. I wish to speak as a pastor who writes a bit but reads more. And as a preacher who is often surprised after a homily that I said something I had never thought before.

In a certain way, this or any discourse is an unveiling of the particular poverty of the speaker. I can only speak out of an impoverished particularity; this is not false humility, it is the metaphysical condition that we all share. We are embodied and therefore historical creatures. Each of us would describe our particularity differently.

Mine begins with the fact that I spoke Spanish at my grandmother's knee and spoke English to the television set. Then I went to school. The rest of the story is of occasional relevance and reflected in the footnotes. Paradoxically, I do not think many of us would trade our particular poverty for anything in the world; it is the indescribable richness through which the life of the Word comes to us and in some way gets translated through us.

I do not doubt that a Catholic writer writes from poverty in a labor that in the end is a response of love to the Word who in his poverty has loved us. Exploring this conviction animates what I want to say today. In some way I wish to encourage you by depicting something of the mystery that envelops you as you write. And even if my words fall far short of their aim, there is, I hope, grace in leaving to silence what I cannot say.[2]

"We rejoice in the poverty assumed by the Word when he took flesh, and secondly we celebrate that poverty that shows itself both in what we can say and in what we cannot say of him. For in 'trying to say God' we encounter all of these poverties and more. By his poverty we are made rich."

So, let us consider for a moment the root and promise of our poverty. Javier Sicilia, the Mexican poet/novelist/human rights activist describes this mystery of the poverty of the Word made flesh in a novel he wrote a few years ago titled *La Confesión*.

Early in the novel a fairly impractical, not to say useless, priest is having an interview with his fairly powerful cardinal archbishop. No one reading in Mexico would doubt the realism of the dialogue between authority and poverty in the church. Javier Sicilia's vision of the poverty of Christ pulses through the novel and is here encapsulated in this fragment. It picks up with the priest speaking quietly while the cardinal sips a tequila. My English translation cannot do justice to the beauty of this passage.

"Do you know what amazes me about the Incarnation?' I continued, 'that it is altogether contrary to the modern world: the presence of the infinite in the limits of the flesh, and the fight, the fight with no quarter, against the temptations of the devil's excesses. You do not know how much I have meditated on the temptations in the desert. 'Take up the power,' the devil told him; that power that gives the illusion of being able to disrupt and dominate everything. But he maintained himself in the limits of his own flesh, in his own poverty, in his own death, so poor, so miserable, so hard. Our age, nevertheless, showing a face of enormous kindness, has succumbed to those temptations. 'They will be like gods, they will change the stones into bread, and they will dominate the world.' ... To such an age we have handed over the Christ, and we do not even realize it."[3]

Limitation is the world's word for poverty. Perhaps we are quietly ashamed of our poverty, and so try to hide it. The world we live in strives to overcome our limitations, our poverty. Showing a face of enormous kindness, we want to free ourselves and others from this poverty. In the midst of this comes the Word enfleshed, who seems to say to us that limitation is not the enemy.

Now that is a jarring word, disconcerting and hardly tolerable to the logic of pervasive human wants. Perhaps today faith in the Christ finds its greatest obstacle in the unthinkable thought that God would renounce the power and accept to maintain himself in the limits of his own flesh, in his own poverty, in his own death, so poor, so miserable, so hard.

Much later in the novel, our fairly useless priest is visiting with an elderly religious sister with whom he shares an abiding friendship and hears her utter the following:

"If misery exists, Father, and the statistics do not lie, it is because the dream of the rich has contaminated the dreams of the poor. At the bottom of things, poverty no longer exists, dear Father. The only thing that exists is wealth and misery. ... Do you know why? I know well that you know. ... Because they have been made to believe that their poverty is a shameful disease, a wound unworthy of the world. Never before has human-

ity, and here, excuse me, Father, I also included our Holy Mother Church, spit so much on the face of Christ, as if his poverty were a filth, that unclean filth that they hung from the cross and which we, as did his detractors, make fun of."[4]

First I want to acknowledge the simple beauty of Sicilia's use of language. Having said that, I would like to look at this from a couple of different angles. First, at its most obvious sense, Sicilia locates the denigration of the poor, and thus the denigration of the Christ, in the contaminating influence of the "dream of the rich," which is in principle a kind of limitless possibility of possession, consumption and the overcoming of human limitation.

Laudato Sí makes the audacious, almost apocalyptic claim that we are witnessing the normalization of the notion that goodness and beauty are synonymous with utility. It's an old human threat, but technical prowess and economic power make the grasping manipulation of ourselves, our neighbor and our surroundings monstrously achievable. The voracious advance of "this age of usage" makes human ecology increasingly hostile to humanity itself.

The first sign of this hostility is the manipulation of the poor, who on Sicilia's telling, are being made to feel shame while being sold a bill of goods. The second sign is the devastation of the natural ecology. We are deeply down this road. This limitless commodification of reality for purposes of provoking limitless consumptive desire makes dystopian fiction less and less a futuristic genre.

It appears we live in a time when words, like the human body itself, are displayed for the sole purpose of provoking consumptive desire. This aggressiveness holds powerful sway and suggests that our cultural moment despairs that words, bodiliness and the whole of material creation, in the end, matter much. We press into heartless service what we little value.

This state of affairs profoundly affects the life of a worker of words. Words are aimed at something more than provoking consumptive desire, just as embodied persons are more than objects of consumptive desire or objects within whom consumptive desire can be provoked. Surely the vocation of a Catholic writer involves contending today with the aggressive reduction of persons to objects and our words to instruments of utilitarian provocation.

Our faith in the Word made flesh both confirms and safeguards our fragile human intuition that every individual human life is a word that agonizes in the act of being spoken, and that this poor telling, so poor, so miserable, so hard, can be a speaking made beautiful by a love that envelops and seeks to saturate it.[5]

Catholics who use words with creatively significant intentions seek to give expression to human life's intelligible speaking, doing so in the abbreviated form of a story, a poem, a novel. The Fathers of the Church delighted in preaching the incarnate Word as both the bearer and the embodiment of all that the Father has to say to us. They spoke of him as the *Verbum breviatum*.[6]

"That the church by grace both engenders and needs artisans of words, painters, sculptors, musicians and other subcreators is akin to an evident truth that flows from revelation."

The many words of the earlier covenants are more briefly assumed into the new; the Lord's parables capture in the fragment the whole of the Gospel; the Lord's Prayer conveys in just a few words the whole mystery of prayer. And finally, the person of Christ himself, displayed in the act of giving himself to the Father for our sakes, both shows and enacts what all his words to us intended to express.

And so it is that the progressively abbreviated expression intensifies the visibility of the Word. Is this not the promise contained in the poor human limit assumed by the Word? Our embrace, then, of the Word in his human particularity surely commits us to follow him into the mystery of the limitation that signifies most intensely.

The Provocations of the Word

Question 46, Article 3, of the *Tertia Pars:* Thomas asks in what sense the cross was necessary for our salvation. Such a beautiful few lines. Such a simple formulation, a fragment that in some way contains the whole.[7]

"In the first place, man knows thereby how much God loves him, and is thereby stirred to love him in return, and herein lies the perfection of human salvation; hence the apostle says in Romans 5:8: God commends his charity toward us; for when as yet we were sinners ... Christ died for us."[8]

Certainly the whole of the *Summa* is contained in these few lines, but that is far less important than the fact that the whole of the salvific drama is here simply expressed. God the Father shows himself in the act of manifesting the crucified Son, and by the Spirit we both see and are made participating agents in the love there displayed. Here, Thomas expresses the *Verbum abbreviatum* of the New Testament revelation.

Put another way he shows us in worded dramatic form the Trinitarian icon of the West; think of Masaccio's three-dimensional image of the Trinity painted in two dimensions. I think we must look at it together, not because we necessarily want to make it the subject of our next essay, poem or novel, but because how we see and respond to this dramatic display will profoundly affect how we write our next essay, poem or novel.

This iconic description is in fact the culmination of a contemplative biblicist's perception of the dynamic of revelation. The drama of the Trinitarian icon in the form of the Crucified is thoroughly divine and uncompromisingly human. It pivots around three moments: the appearing, the provocative insight and the response. In some sense the drama is in the perception and in the interpretation of the provocative appearing. Yet the greater dramatic weight is in the character, quality and direction of the human response to this divine provocation.

Thomas alludes to the intrusive appearing of Christ in the citation of Romans 5: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." We were quite unprepared for this appearing. His arriving was not the descent of an invited guest nor was he made all that welcome when at last he came. The time, place and manner of the Word's manifestation was entirely hidden in the wise counsel of

the living God.

Thomas' invocation of St. Paul's text serves to give authoritative characterization of the intrusion's motive from God's point of view. God appears as one commending, that is to say, manifesting persuasively his love for us. This is the divine eros, a dramatic move to show himself as he is, which is equivalent to showing himself in the act of love. The human drama, which is also a kind of eros, is entwined in the divine display and is simply captured by Thomas in the verbs he uses: *cognoscit, provocatur* and *ad diligendum*. We are intended to know something, to be provoked to something and to respond in some way.

This provocative appearing is directed to our desire; it aims radically to divert our attention (which is always derivative of desire) away from what is normative for us to something new, something not derivative from our lived experience in the world. Jean-Luc Marion presses into service the word *anamorphosis* to describe this phenomenon.[9] This involves a jarring shift of perspective by which one sees, or at least glimpses, as God sees. Conversion precisely entails this radical re-visioning.

In keeping with plain Catholic doctrine this revising shift can only happen through the prior attractive grace present in the appearing itself: "*Ista attractio, ipsa est revelatio*," as St. Augustine says: This attraction is itself the revelation. Thus, divine love is both the revelation and embodies its own attractive force. It makes possible our free movement toward it and in it: *"Seduxisti me Domine, et seductus sum."*[10]

The parables of the kingdom can help us get a sense of the *ista attractio*. In the parables, the attractive character of the kingdom is in the very proposing of a viewpoint other than our own. Often the arousal of desire for the kingdom involves dramatic depiction of a viewpoint that sees what is missing. Thus the prodigal son saw something made present to his mind, and it told him what he was lacking, and this stirred him to return home. The widow saw what she no longer had, a silver coin, and it stirred her to search.

The experience of what attracts to God can look quite bizarre to the casual observer. The clever steward who seems to scandalize the reader who only looks for moral lessons in the parables knows his future hangs in the balance now that his master has decided to dismiss him. So he makes friends with the poor by, illegally perhaps, reducing their debts. The parable offends someone who expects the Lord only to show us ethics. It makes sense to one who perceives that his interest is in provoking us to see that the kingdom involves an urgent desire to avoid disaster, and friendship with the poor is the surest way to proceed.

"Perhaps today faith in the Christ finds its greatest obstacle in the unthinkable thought that God would renounce the power and accept to maintain himself in the limits of his own flesh, in his own poverty, in his own death, so poor, so miserable, so hard."

As readers I do not doubt that we have all had the experience of being attracted and moved to a perspectival shift of some kind. It seems to me most great literature aims to affect our seeing. I have on occasion been resistant to a book because the perspectival revision proposed struck me as too aggressive or in some way persuasive in a direction I did not want to pursue. Let me just say *Interview With a Vampire* was too successful in depicting the evil of draining someone's life away as attractive. I never finished the book. Conversely, Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* fascinate me. I enjoy them, and though I am quite sure there is a perspectival shift being proposed, I have not sensed this to be problematic; quite the contrary.

My point, though, is that as readers we make decisions all the time about what authors are trying to show us and how far we are willing to let them show it. This experience is analogous to the work of grace implied by the Trinitarian icon in its attractive phase. Either consciously or not, our writing will share in this analogous relation. And in principle our writing can be aligned in diverse ways with the icon's attractive intent even as the parables were.

Now then, faith's character as an apprehended intuition, a gratuitously offered and accepted provocation to God's point of view, forms the basis for the regenerative work of grace. By it we are made capable of responding. We rise, as it were, to the level of actual participation in the love revealed in the iconic drama.

It should be noted that this is exactly the point at which Catholic anthropology holds as paramount what later Reformation theologies will relegate to lesser importance. The response of love to the love offered is the salvific moment. Thus, Thomas says of the move to love God in return: "Herein lies the perfection of human salvation." For Thomas, stopping at the moment of insight into the meaning of the icon, equivalent to the act of faith, is a tragic failure. The insight of faith is stunted in its teleology if it does not trigger within us the infusion of charity that loves God in return.

This responsiveness is directed to the poor Christ and by immediate extension to the neighbor. "Lord, when did we feed you when you were hungry; when did we clothe you when you were naked?"[11] This entire movement constitutes active, willed participation in God's own love.

One of the remarkable aspects of Thomas' account is how completely the divine/human drama is enveloped in charity. It is love which motivates the divine appearing; it is this love appearing which itself attracts us willingly into the altering of our gaze. And it is love generated by the grace of faith and given in response to God that perfects the salvific action. For Thomas, the intellect may be the highest human faculty, but salvation is in the will inasmuch as charity is the love we gracefully/humanly return.

To insist on the primacy of charity in the Christian life is to open up the enormous dramatic consequences of human agency, which in its most pristine description is responsiveness to the gift of love. The response to the divine provocation can be immensely varied; to name a few, it can be sudden, subtle, lethargic or thwarted.[12] The parable of the sower is not unrelated to this aspect of a Catholic dramatic vision.

Here it would be appropriate to say the word *hope*. Because of the obstacles human persons can encounter within this dramatic vista, hope emerges as the

divinely sustained medium of life. The lethargic and the thwarted response need not remain so.

Since the Incarnation, something extraordinary has been unleashed upon the world: It is the irruption of grace in flesh. The visibility of the divine is a manifestation of the divine love, a God-desire to be seen as love in the midst of his creation. His appearing affects every aspect of human agency: the senses, the passions, the appetites, the intellect and the will. Human creativity cannot but be affected by being pulled into the divine expressive love. A Catholic writer contemplates this mystery and wonders how to extend the reach of its visibility.

I think of Bernanos' book *The Imposter*. In it he carefully lays out the human contingencies that lead to the second volume, *Joy*. The drama of the appearing of grace and the drama of refusal emerge throughout these works in expressive elegance. At the end of the second book, we see the Imposter Cénabre struggling up a flight of stairs and finally admitting that he must do what he alone cannot do, he says to the distraught cook: "Will you kindly give me your hand, ... I fear I cannot take a single step unassisted." And then the viewpoint shifts to the poor woman, chosen here to witness what his exhausted, surrendering flesh can only intimate:

"She felt her arm seized with convulsive force. At once he began climbing the stairs, slowly, heavily, as though he were pushing a tremendous weight with his forehead. And when, after the door had been opened, the light struck his face, frozen in an anguish that was more than human, the poor woman, in spite of her terror, could not suppress a cry of pity."[13]

In my limited reading, this is one of the most expressive scenes in modern literature. Bernanos, whom I cite here in exemplary fashion, is surely among the great crafters of the story. He is a challenge for us, as are many Catholic authors of the last century. His work resonates beyond his time and place. Yet it is not possible now for us to write as he did.

This should not surprise us. After all, St. Ignatius did what St. Francis and St. Dominic did without actually doing what they did. Bernanos wrote from the particular poverty of his moment and from a contemplative stance before the poor Christ's provocative appearing. To write as a Catholic is most properly to do just that. Our response will be different though, because, though the poor Christ is the same, our poverty before him now is different.

The Word at the Edge

The jarring perspectival shift contained in the act of faith and responded to in charity in some way transposes the believer and turns the disguised divine appearing into the discernible and pervasive presence. We speak and write in the grace of this perspective. Herein lies the nonbeliever's great frustration with us.

"As readers we make decisions all the time about what authors are trying to show us and how far we are willing to let them show it. This experience is analogous to the work of grace implied by the Trinitarian icon in its attractive phase. Either consciously or not, our writing will share in this analogous relation."

To the tepid believer or to the nonbeliever, the tradition of literature forged within the Catholic anamorphosis is one of many strands within the larger historical categorization of artistic traditions and literary history. This tradition may or may not appear remarkable within this historicization. In fact contemporary literary criticism seems to have a vested interest in noting how it is quite unremarkable within the historical trajectory.

For many literary critics, a literature nourished by a dogmatic religious faith is but a phase that is bound to be superseded by our current happy progression into intellectually uncommitted status. This amorphous critical perspective, which is anything but happy, is actually a mix of hostile aversions to any claims about meaning in the world.

Yet there is another way to read the history of literature. If the incarnation of the Word is the intense-most signification of the love unseen behind all that is, then the rejection of this sign was bound to wind itself historically toward the current cultural fear that behind all that is, there is nothing at all. To say it this way puts in high relief where our current contentious edge lies.

Deconstruction is an apophaticism that cannot conceive of the Word beyond human wordiness. As a philosophical, literary and cultural phenomenon it is a movement that sees meaning as a pure construction of the aggressive mind; meaning, thus, is something like a human institution. And like institutions, words must be shown for what they are when deconstructed: At root, for the deconstructionist culture, universal claims of meaning are idolatry, an aggressive kingdom that keeps its subjects within a controlled dominion. In that sense meaning is an extension of the human power play.

"Game of Thrones," whether conceived so or not, is a parable of deconstruction. This distrust of meaning is extended to the church in a particularly intense way because she is perceived as the paramount institution that proposes meaning.[14]

Being an institution that is inherently protective of the claims of signification is not the real problem though. The problem for us is construing the institution and the meanings without relation to their original source and final end. The various versions of deconstruction admit of no such original source that lies behind and above both meanings and institutions, which is why their fruit is bleakness. We, in fact, do admit of this source, which is why the fruit of our labor should be hope.

For the Catholic, the idolatry of worded meaning is a temptation as is the rendering of church in her temporal form as an absolute. In the case of the church, her form derives from the kingdom of the crucified and risen Christ, just as in apophaticism meaning is derivative and relative to the Word beyond human speaking. Temporal meanings and ecclesial forms are necessary for us as vehicles toward what they both sacramentally signify. Words and the church house us in a forward-moving fashion. Their form will give way when they have served their poor

yet noble purpose.

Thomas says somewhere in *De Veritate:*

"Whatever our understanding conceives of God falls short of his representation; and thus what he is always remains hidden from us; and this is the highest knowledge of him which we can have in this life, that we know God to be above all that which we think of him."[15]

Dante says what Thomas says about unsayability when he invents the verb *trasumanar* in order to say that "to pass beyond the human cannot be signified through words."[16] Dante never tires of squeezing out of the language the outlines of a description molded to tell us what he cannot say, cannot remember, cannot describe.[17] Dante's glorious failure in describing the heavenly city, the church in her transfigured form, should hold a privileged place in our literary and theological memory.[18]

If Dante breathed the air of the theological tradition that kept guard over the unsayability of the Godhead, it is because the tradition held fast to something present in the Lord's own announcement of the kingdom. There is a kind of transgression, and indeed a kind of deconstruction, that is built into the Gospel announcement itself. Every positive description of the kingdom is at the same time a negation of what the figure of the world proposes as normative.

The kingdom is not like the rich man's table; it is like Lazarus' vindication. The kingdom is not about cultivating relations with people who can profit you, it's about being good to people who cannot pay you back. The kingdom is not like simply fulfilling the law; it is like selling all you have and giving to the poor. The kingdom is not like Pilate's judgment seat; it is like Christ judged and giving taciturn witness to the truth.

The transgressive character of the Lord's announcement bears the marks of the Word's scourging of the form of the world as we know it. The face of that Word appeared more clear to us when, in love, it was he who took the scourging.

In this sense, the perspectival shift to God's point of view deconstructs any absolute claims in the world. The only absolute left is the forward-moving imprint of divine love on the form of creation. It is the resurrection of the Christ tending us toward the Apocalypse. Both the church and our words are at the service of this tending toward the wedding feast of the lamb. Thus, in Christianity, deconstruction is a radical purification that relativizes in order to save. If there is demolition, it is for the sake of uncovering the ground of love.[19]

It may be that the believer's paradox of not being able to say God is met on the other side by the unbeliever's paradox of not being able not to say God. I mean that the impulse toward signification is a drive in us more powerful than even the sexual drive.

"[Christ's] appearing affects every aspect of human agency: the senses, the passions, the appetites, the intellect and the will. Human creativity cannot but be affected by being pulled into the divine expressive love. A Catholic writer contemplates this mystery and wonders how to extend the reach of its visibility."

To be a true deconstructionist tending toward nihilism, you have to constantly remind yourself that what you naturally seek, a meaning in things, is illusory. For a true nihilist to derive joy from something as simple as the sweep of words that lead us to see the eagles as they come for Frodo and Sam, here at the end of all things, is akin to an act of infidelity to his professed first love. But such a one will repent of having been moved by the sense of the scene, lest others accuse him of having said God.[20]

But most people are not true nihilists; they are rather agnostics about the possibility of anything more than merely useful and thus passing signification. And this practical agnosticism is born of having been schooled in a culture of distrust. In such a culture meaning is utilitarian and fleeting, and why it comes and why it leaves is lost to darkness. Our witness involves a befriending of the dark, not by taming it, but by listening to and speaking the Word as he names himself from there.

A Catholic writer lives and works at this edge of meaning, between light and the dark, and our witness emerges from that place. God is beyond our saying, but not beyond saying himself into us.[21] This is the source of our hope. With John of the Cross we intuit the difficulty and promise of hearing the Word in the dark: "s*in otra luz y guía / sino la que en el corazón ardía*."

En la noche dichosa,
en secreto, que nadie me veía,
ni yo miraba cosa, sin otra luz y guía
sino la que en el corazón ardía.[22]

And with Hopkins, we intuit both the difficulty and the promise inherent in speaking the Word-Love. But we must in the end try to speak it: *Caritas Christi urget nos*.[23] Not as the world warily and wearily speaks it, but as the Word irrupting in flesh spoke and speaks it. Behold, the "master of the tides," the "Ground of being and granite of it," the "past all / Grasp God" who has shown "a mercy that outrides." With the poets we must make the arduous journey and respond to "Our passion-plungèd giant risen, / The Christ of the Father compassionate."

I admire thee, master of the tides,
Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;
The recurb and the recovery of the gulf's sides,
The girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall;
Staunching, quenching ocean of a motionable mind;
Ground of being, and granite of it: past all
Grasp God, throned behind
Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides;
With a mercy that outrides
The all of water, an ark
For the listener; for the lingerer with a love glides
Lower than death and the dark;
A vein for the visiting of the past-prayer, pent in prison,
The-last-breath penitent spirits — the uttermost mark
Our passion-plungèd giant risen,
The Christ of the Father compassionate, fetched in the storm of his strides.[24]

Thank you for your kind attention.

Notes

1 2 Cor 8:9.

2 Javier Sicilia: *La confesión: El diario de Esteban Martorus* (Debolsillo, 2016, electronic format): pos. 704: *"Tal vez los lenguajes sean en realidad una cuerda de silencios cuyos nudos son las palabras. Para nosotros, los cristianos, el Verbo es el silencio coeterno que un día, por el silencio atento de María, se articuló en Jesús de Nazareth y nos echó a andar. El silencio permite que la palabra de otro se haga Él en nosotros."*

3 Ibid., pos. 176: *"Sabe qué me maravilla de la encarnación? — continue — que es todo lo contrario del mundo moderno: la presencia del infinito en los límites de la carne, y la lucha, la lucha sin cuartel, contra las tentaciones de las desmesuras del diablo. No sabe cuánto he meditado en las tentaciones del desierto. 'Asume el poder,' le decía el diablo; ese poder que da la ilusión de trastocar y dominar todo. Pero él se mantuvo en los límites de su propia carne, en su propia pobreza, en su propia muerte, tan pobre, tan miserable, tan dura. Nuestra época, sin embargo, bajo el rostro de una enorme bondad, ha sucumbido a esas tentaciones. 'Serán como dioses, cambiarán las piedras en panes, dominarán el mundo.' ... A ella le hemos entregado a Cristo y no nos damos cuenta."*

4 Ibid., pos. 1669: *"Si la miseria existe y las estadísticas no mienten es porque el sueño de los ricos ha contaminado los sueños de los pobres. En el fondo ya no existela pobreza, querido padre. Lo único que existe es la riqueza y la miseria. ... ¿Sabe por qué? Sé bien que lo sabe. ... Porque se les ha hecho creer que su pobreza es una enfermedad vergonzosa, una llaga indigna del mundo. Nunca la humanidad, y aquí, discúlpeme, padre, incluyo también a nuestra Santa Madre, había escupido tanto sobre el rostro de Cristo, como si su pobreza se tratara de una porquería, de esa inmunda porquería que colgaron de la cruz y de la cual, como lo hicieron sus detractores, nos burlamos."*

5 Ratzinger, *"La Belleza"* in *La Belleza, La Iglesia (Ediciones Encuentro*, 2006, electronic format) pos. 93: *"Quien cree en Dios, en el Dios que se ha manifestado precisamente en los semblantes alterados de Cristo crucificado como amor 'hasta el fin' (Jn 13:1), sabe que la belleza es verdad y que la verdad es belleza, pero en Cristo sufriente aprende también que la belleza de la verdad implica ofensa, dolor y, sí, también el oscuro misterio de la muerte, que sólo se puede encontrar en la aceptación del dolor, y no en su rechazo."*

6 See St. Cyprian of Carthage, *De Dominica Oratione*, 28-30. A common and fruitful consideration in the Latin Middle Ages, drawing from Isaiah 10:23 and Romans 9:28.

7 Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty, Towards a Theology of Aesthetics* (Eerdmans, 2008, electronic format), Chapter 2: "The Word of Beauty, Thomas Aquinas": "The Whole has made its home in the fragment because the relationship of love which constitutes it as purest beginning of all that is has now offered itself in the flesh: Beauty is the arche of the Three, revealed in its highest form at the hour of the abandonment of the cross, where the suffering of the crucified God opens the way into the depths of divine communion."

8 *Summa Theologiae,* III, 46, 3, c.: *"Primo enim, per hoc homo cognoscit quantum Deus hominem diligat, et per hoc provocatur ad eum diligendum, in quo perfectio humanae salutis consistit. Unde apostolus dicit, Rom. V, commendat suam caritatem Deus in nobis, quoniam, cum inimici essemus, Christus pro nobis mortuus est."*

9 Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen Lewis (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 64: "In order to see the uncovered mysterion, it is thus necessary to pass from our spirit to the Spirit of God, so as to see it as God sees it. This is nothing less than an overturning of intentionality: taking the intentional gaze of God on God, instead of claiming to retain our intentionality in front of the intuition of the mysterion. I have identified elsewhere this overturning or transferal of intentionality as an anamorphosis."

10 Jer 20:7.

11 See Mt 25 and *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 27, 8, c., where St. Thomas cites 1 Jn 4:21, on this point: "This commandment we have from God, that he, who loveth God, love also his brother."

12 Marion, *Givenness,* 48: "Revelation consists only in the attraction by the Father toward the Son, in order to see the Father in him: '*Ista revelatio, ipsa est attractio*.' Whether this attraction is felt as gentle or violent changes nothing: Revelation exerts these two effects simply because it brings itself to bear. We believe in God when we will it, clearly; but we will it only when we love that which we desire."

13 Bernanos, Joy (Pantheon Books, 1946): The final chapter. *La Joie (Édition du groupe, Ebooks libres et gratuits)* 1929 edition, p. 236: *"Ayez donc la bonté de me donner la main, dit Cénabre. Je crains de ne pouvoir faire un seul pas. / Elle se sentit saisir le bras avec une force convulsive. Aussitôt il se mit à monter à ses côtés, lentement, pesamment, comme s'il eût repoussé du front, à grand-peine, un poids immense. Et lorsque, la porte ouverte de nouveau, la lumière vint frapper ce visage pétrifié par une anxiété plus qu'humaine, si grande que fût la terreur de la pauvre fille, elle ne retint pas un cri de pitié."*

14 Pope Benedict, writing about 15 years before his election, identified with characteristic succinctness an important aspect of the current situation faced by the church: "For the great part of the people, the discontent with the church has its origin in the fact that it is an institution like so many others, and as such, it limits my freedom. ... The anger against the church or the disappointment that it provokes has a specific character, because from her is expected, quietly, more than is expected from other mundane institutions." Ratzinger, *"La Iglesia"*: in *La Belleza, La Iglesia (Ediciones Encuentro*, 2006, electronic format) pos. 204: *"Para la mayor parte de la gente, el descontento frente a la Iglesia tiene su origen en que es una institución como tantas otras y que, como tal, limita mi libertad. ... La ira contra la Iglesia o la desilusión que provoca tienen un carácter específico, porque de ella se espera, calladamente, más de lo que se espera de otras instituciones mundanas."*

15 *De Veritate* 2, i, ad 9m: *"Quidquid intellectus noster de Deo concipit, est deficiens a repraesentatione eius; et ideo quid est ipsius Dei semper nobis occultum remanet; et haec est summa cognitio quam de ipso in statu viae habere possumus, ut cognoscamus Deum esse supra omne id quod cogitamus de eo."*

16 *Paradiso* I, 70-1: "*Trasumanar significar per verba / non si poría*" ("Transhumanizing cannot be signified in words."). See William Franke, *Dante and the Sense of Transgression* (Bloomsbury, 2013, electronic format), p. 8.

17 William Franke, *Dante*, p. 52: It is through resolutely transgressing every order of presentation and representation that Dante finally delivers his divine vision. Most deeply understood, it is a nonvision — which, nevertheless, in its very forgetfulness casts a shadow of infinitely rich and nuanced images that are glimpsed in the act of disappearing.

18 William Frankie, *Dante*, p. 84: Dante, too, develops a poetics of failure in order not so much to deliver his final vision as to describe the impediments to his doing so. Paradoxically, the tale of his failure becomes his success, and he too sojourns indefinitely among the dead in the poem which survives him.

19 As Thomas Pfau (*Minding the Modern*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) says of "modernity's leading paradigm of knowledge," almost in passing: "Plato (as indeed Coleridge himself) might have simply called it a philosophy that no longer offers a conceptual or imaginative space for love — which might itself be the most salient characteristic of philosophical modernity."

20 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Harper-Collins e-books), Book 6, Ch. 4, "The Field of Cormallen": "I am glad that you are here with me,' said Frodo. 'Here at the end of all things, Sam.' 'Yes, I am with you, Master,' said Sam, laying Frodo's wounded hand gently to his breast. 'And you're with me. And the journey's finished. But after coming all that way I don't want to give up yet. It's not like me, somehow, if you understand.'"

21 See *Summa Theologiae*, I, 43, 5, ad. 2, where Thomas cites Augustine (*De Trin*. iv, 20): "The Son is sent, whenever he is known and perceived by anyone. / [...] *Et ideo signanter dicit Augustinus quod filius mittitur, cum a quoquam cognoscitur atque percipitur*." *De Trinitate* iv, 20, is cited frequently in I, 43.

22 St. John of the Cross, *Noche Oscura,* v. 3: "On the blessed night, / in secret, that nobody saw me, / nor did I anything see, / without any light and guide / except the one burning within me."

23 2 Cor 5:14: "The love of Christ compels us."

24 Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, stanzas 32, 33. I am indebted to Ron Hansen for his novel *Exiles: A Novel* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008) for a deeper, more humane, appreciation of Hopkins' work. ■

Speech Opening Diocese of Rome's Pastoral Conference on the Family

Pope Francis

"The current situation is gradually giving rise in all of our lives, and especially in our families, to the experience of feeling 'uprooted,'" Pope Francis said June 19 at the opening of the Diocese of Rome's pastoral conference, which was focusing on the family. Speaking at the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the pope said, "An uprooted culture, an uprooted family is a family without history, without memory, indeed without roots. And when we are not rooted, any wind can end up carrying us away. For this reason, one of the first things we must think about as parents, as families, as pastors is the settings in which to root ourselves, where to create bonds, find roots, where to grow that fundamental network that allows us to feel 'home.'" Pope Francis has often talked about the need for young people to learn from their grandparents, and in his speech to the pastoral conference he said that if parents don't provide this opportunity, children should "overstep" the parents so they can learn their roots. Pope Francis discussed adolescence, which he called a time of "difficulty" and "instability," but also a time of "growth." He said, " I am often worried by the current tendency to prematurely 'medicalize' our young people," and pointed out that "adolescence is not a pathology." Pope Francis said young people "want to be protagonists: Let us give them room so they may be protagonists, guiding them — obviously — and giving them the tools to develop all this growth." The pope spoke in Italian; a Vatican translation of

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As that priest said, "Before speaking, I shall say a few words."

I wish to thank Cardinal Vallini for his words, and I would like to say something that he was unable to say because it is a secret, but the pope can say it.

After the election, when they told me that I had to go first to the Pauline chapel and then to the balcony to greet the people, immediately the name of the cardinal vicar came to my mind: "I am the bishop; there is a vicar general. …" Right away. I even felt it fondly. And I called him. And on the other side Cardinal Hummes, who was at my side during the ballot count and who told me things that helped me. These two accompanied me, and from that moment I said, "On the balcony with my vicar." There, on the balcony.

From that moment on he has accompanied me, and I wish to thank him. He has many virtues and also a sense of objectivity that has helped me many times because at times I "fly" and he helps me "land" with so much charity. I thank you, your eminence, for the companionship.

But Cardinal Vallini is not retiring, because he belongs to six congregations and will continue to work, and it is better this way because a Neapolitan without work would be a calamity in the dioceses ... [laughter, applause]. I would like to thank him publicly for his help. Thank you!

And to all of you, good afternoon!

I thank you for this opportunity enabling me to begin this, your diocesan conference, in which you will discuss an important theme for the life of our families: to accompany parents in the education of their adolescent children. In these days you will reflect upon several key topics that correspond in some way to the places in which our being a family is played out (home, school, social networks, the intergenerational relationship, the precariousness of life and family isolation).

I would like to share with you a few "premises" that may help us in this reflection. Often we do not realize it, but the spirit we reflect with is just as important as the content (a good athlete knows that the warmup counts as much as the performance that follows). Therefore, this conversation can help us in this sense: a "warmup" and then it will be up to you to "give it all you've got." I will divide this presentation into small sections.

In 'Roman'!

To enter this theme, I wished to call the first of the keys "In Roman": the actual dialect of the Romans. We often fall into the temptation of thinking or reflecting on things generally, in the abstract. Thinking about problems, about situations, about adolescents. And in this way, without realizing it, we fall completely into nominalism. We would like to embrace everything but we accomplish nothing.

"One of the first things we must think about as parents, as families, as pastors is the settings in which to root ourselves, where to create bonds, find roots, where to grow that fundamental network that allows us to feel 'home.'"

Today I invite you to think "in dialect" about this theme. And to do this we have to make a considerable effort, because we are called to think about our families in the context of a big city like Rome with all its wealth, opportunities, variety and at the same time with all its challenges. Not to close ourselves off and ignore the rest (we are always Italians), but to face reflection and even moments of prayer with a healthy and stimulating realism — no abstraction, no generalization, no nominalism.

Family life and the education of adolescents in a great metropolis like this requires particular attention at the foundation, and we cannot take it lightly. Because educating or being a family is not the same thing in a small town as it is in a metropolis. I am not saying it is better or worse. It is simply different. The complexity of the capital does not allow for reductive summaries but rather spurs us to a multifaceted way of thinking, through which every neighborhood and zone echoes in the diocese and in this way the diocese can be visible, palpable in every ecclesial community, with its own way of being.

You experience the tensions of this great city. In many of the pastoral visits I have made a few of your daily practical experiences have been presented to me: distances between home and work (in some cases up to two hours to get there); the lack of close family ties because of having to relocate to find work or to be able to afford rent; living always "down to the last penny" to get to the end of the month because the pace of life is more costly in and of itself (it is easier to manage in small towns); time is often insufficient for getting to know neighbors where we live; the need in so many homes to leave children all alone.

And thus we could go on listing a large number of situations that touch the life of our families. Therefore carry out your reflection and prayer "in Roman," in practice with all these concrete things, with the very real faces of families and thinking about how you can help each other to form your children within this reality.

The Holy Spirit is the great initiator and generator of processes in our societies and situations. He is the great guide of transformative and salvific dynamics. With him, do not be afraid to "walk" through your neighborhoods and to think about how to give an impetus to the accompaniment of parents and adolescents, that is, in concrete terms.

Connected

In addition to the previous one, I would like to focus on another important aspect. The current situation is gradually giving rise in all of our lives, and especially in our families, to the experience of feeling "uprooted." We speak of a "liquid society" — and so it is — but today I would like in this context to present to you the growing phenomenon of the uprooted society.

This means people, families who are gradually losing their ties, that essential fabric so important to feeling a part of one another, partners with others in a common plan. It is the experience of knowing that "we belong" to others (in the noblest sense of the term). It is important to keep in mind this climate of uprootedness, because little by little it seeps into our gaze and especially into our children's life.

An uprooted culture, an uprooted

family is a family without history, without memory, indeed without roots. And when we are not rooted, any wind can end up carrying us away. For this reason, one of the first things we must think about as parents, as families, as pastors is the settings in which to root ourselves, where to create bonds, find roots, where to grow that fundamental network that allows us to feel "home."

Today social networks would seem to offer us this area of "network," of connection with others, and they also make our children feel part of a group. But the problem that they bring because of their very "virtuality" is that they leave us as if "up in the air" — I have said "liquid society"; we can say "fizzy society" — and therefore very "volatile." There is no worse alienation for a person than to feel he or she has no roots, that he or she does not belong to anyone.

So often we demand from our children excessive formation in certain fields that we consider important for their future. We make them study a number of things so they may give their "best." But we do not give the same importance to the fact that they know their land, their roots. We deprive them of knowing the great people and the saints who engendered us. I know you have a workshop dedicated to intergenerational dialogue, to the area of grandparents.

I know it might be repetitive, but I feel it as something the Holy Spirit has imprinted on my heart: In order that our young people may have visions, may be "dreamers," may face the future with boldness and courage, it is necessary that they listen to the prophetic dreams of their fathers (cf. Jl 3:1). If we want our children to be formed and prepared for the future, it is not only by learning languages (to give an example) that they will succeed. It is necessary that they be connected, that they know their roots. Only in this way will they be able to fly high; otherwise they will be captured by the visions of others.

And I return to this, I am obsessed perhaps but … parents must make space for their children to speak to their grandparents. Many times the grandfather or the grandmother is in a retirement home, and they do not go to visit them. They must speak [to them]. Even by overstepping parents but taking roots from their grandparents. Grandparents have this quality of transmitting history, faith, belonging. And they do it with the wisdom of those who are on the threshold, ready to leave.

I return, I have said several times, to the passage of Joel (cf. 3:1): "Your old men shall dream and your young people shall prophesy." And you are the bridge. Nowadays we do not let grandparents dream, we discard them. This culture discards grandparents because grandparents do not produce; this is the "throwaway culture." But grandparents can only dream when they meet a new life; then they dream, they talk …

"We often think that education is imparting knowledge, and along the way we leave emotional illiterates and young people with countless incomplete plans because they have found no one to teach them how to 'do.' We have concentrated education on the head, overlooking the heart and hands. This too is a form of social fragmentation."

But think of Simeon, think about that chatterbox Anna who went from one place to another saying, "It is that one! It is that one!" This is beautiful; this is beautiful. They are the grandparents who dream and they give children [the sense of] belonging that they need.

I would like that in this intergenerational workshop you undertake an examination of conscience on this. To find the concrete history in grandparents. And not to leave them aside. I do not know if I have recounted this once, but a memory of a story that one of my two grandmothers told me comes to my mind.

Once upon a time there was a widowed grandfather in a family. He lived with the family but he had aged and when they ate, some soup would fall from his mouth or some saliva, and he would get a bit soiled. And the father decided to make him eat on his own in the kitchen, "so we can invite friends." And so it was.

A few days later, he comes back from work and he finds his child playing with a hammer, nails, wood. "What are you making?" — "A table." — "Why a table?" — "A table to eat at" — "But why?" — "So that when you get old, you can eat there by yourself." This child had understood intuitively where the roots were.

In Motion

Educating adolescents in motion. Adolescence is a phase of transition in the life of not only your children but of the whole family — the whole family is in a transitional phase — you know it well and you experience it; and as such, we must address it in its totality.

It is a phase of bridging, and for this reason adolescents are neither here nor there; they are in motion, in transit. They are not children (and they do not want to be treated as such), and they are not adults (but they want to be treated as such, especially at the level of privileges). They are experiencing precisely this tension, first of all within themselves and then with those who surround them.[1]

They always seek confrontation; they question, dispute everything; they look for answers. And at times, they do not listen to the answers, and they ask another question before the parents say the answer. They pass through these various states of mind and their families with them.

However, allow me to tell you that it is a precious time in the life of your children. A difficult time, yes. A time of changes and of instability, yes. A phase that presents great risks, no doubt. But above all, it is a time of growth for them and for the entire family.

Adolescence is not a pathology, and we cannot address it as though it were. A child who experiences his or her adolescence (as difficult as it may be for the parents) is a child with a future and hope. I am often worried by the current tendency to prematurely "medicalize" our young people. It seems that everything is resolved by medicalizing, or controlling everything with the slogan "make the most of your time," and in this way young people's agenda is worse than that of a senior manager.

Therefore, I insist: Adolescence is not

a pathology that we must combat. It is a normal, natural part of growing up, of the life of our young people. Where there is life there is movement; where there is movement, there are changes, seeking, uncertainty; there is hope, joy and also anguish and desolation.

Let us correctly frame our discernment within the foreseeable fundamental processes. There are margins that are necessary to be aware of so as not to be alarmed, not to be careless, nor to be negligent, but to know how to accompany and help [young people] to grow. Not everything is insignificant, but neither does everything have equal importance. For this reason, it is important to discern which battles are to be fought and which are not. In this matter it is very helpful to listen to couples with experience, who, although they can never give us a recipe, can help us with their testimony to know this or that margin or range of behavior.

Our young people seek to be and want to feel they are — logically — protagonists. They do not at all like to feel commanded or to respond to "orders" coming from the adult world (they follow their "accomplices'" rules of the game). They seek that complicit autonomy that lets them feel "they are in control of themselves." And here we have to pay attention to uncles and aunts, especially those who have no children or who are not married.

I learned my first bad words from a "spinster" uncle [laughter]. In order to gain the favor of their nephews or nieces, they often do not do the right thing. There was the uncle who used to sneakily give us cigarettes ... things of those times. And nowadays ... I am not saying they are bad, but one has to be careful.

In this search for autonomy that young people want, we can find a good opportunity, especially for schools, parishes and ecclesial movements. To encourage activities that put them to the test, that make them feel like protagonists. They need this. Let us help them!

They seek in many ways the "dizziness" that makes them feel alive. So, let's give it to them! Let us encourage all that helps them to transform their dreams into projects and enables them to discover that all the potential they have is a bridge, a passageway to a vocation (in the broadest and most beautiful sense of the word).

Let us offer them broad goals, great challenges, and let us help them to accomplish them, to reach their goals. Let us not leave them on their own. Thus, let us challenge them more than they challenge us.

Let us not allow them to receive that "dizzying sensation" from others who do nothing but put their lives at risk: Let us give it to them ourselves but the right dizziness that satisfies this desire to move, to go forward. We see many parishes that have the capacity to "capture" adolescents. "These three days of holiday, let us go to the mountains, let us do something ... or let us go whitewash that school in a poor neighborhood that needs it." Make them protagonists of something.

"We find many adolescent parents, many. Adults who do not want to be adults and want to play at being adolescents forever. This 'marginalization' can augment a natural tendency that young people have to isolate themselves or to stop their growth processes for lack of comparison. There is competition but no comparison."

This calls for finding educators capable of committing themselves to young people's growth. It calls for educators spurred by love and by the passion to make grow in them the life of the Spirit of Jesus, to show that being Christian demands courage and is a beautiful thing.

To educate today's adolescents we cannot continue to use a merely scholastic teaching model of ideas alone. It is necessary to follow the pace of their growth. It is important to help them to acquire self-esteem, to believe that they can truly succeed in all they apply themselves to. In motion. Always.

Integrated Education

This process requires a simultaneous and integrated manner of developing the various languages that build us as persons. That means teaching our young people to integrate all that they are and that they do. We might call it socio-integrated alphabetizing, which is education based on the intellect (the head), feelings (the heart) and actions (the hands). This will offer our young people the opportunity for harmonious growth not only at the personal but at the same time the social level. It is essential to create places where social fragmentation is not the dominant framework.

To this end, it is important to teach them to think what they feel and do, to feel what they think and do, and to do what they think and feel, that is, integrating the three languages. A dynamism of ability placed at the service of the person and of society. This will help enable our young people to feel active and as protagonists in their growth processes, and will also lead them to feel called to participate in the building of the community.

They want to be protagonists: Let us give them room so they may be protagonists, guiding them — obviously — and giving them the tools to develop all this growth. For this I believe that the harmonious integration of different spheres of knowledge — of the mind, the heart and the hands — will help them to build their character.

We often think that education is imparting knowledge, and along the way we leave emotional illiterates and young people with countless incomplete plans because they have found no one to teach them how to "do." We have concentrated education on the head, overlooking the heart and hands. This too is a form of social fragmentation.

At the Vatican, when the guards take their leave, I receive them one by one, those who are leaving. The day before yesterday, I received six [of them]. One by one. "What are you doing, what will you do?" I thank them for their service. And one of them said this to me: "I am going to be a carpenter. I would like to be a woodworker, but I will be a carpenter. Because my father taught me a lot about this and my grandfather too." The desire to "do": This young man was well educated with the language of doing, and his heart is good too because he was thinking about his father and his grandfather, an affectionate good heart. Learning "how to do." This struck me.

Yes to Adolescence, No to Competition

As the last element, it is important for us to reflect on an environmental dynamic that involves everyone. It is interesting to observe how young people want to be grownups and grownups want to be or have become adolescents.

We cannot ignore this culture, since it is air that we all breathe. Today there is a sort of competition between parents and children different from that of other eras in which a confrontation normally occurred between one and the other. Today we have passed from comparison to competition.

There are two different dynamics of the spirit. Our young people today find much competition and few people to measure themselves against. The adult world has welcomed "eternal youth" as a paradigm and model of success. It seems that to grow up, to mature, to age is a bad thing. It is synonymous with a frustrated or used-up life. Today it seems that everything is to be masked and concealed. As if the very fact of living had no meaning. Appearances, not aging, wearing makeup. ... I feel sorry when I see those who dye their hair.

How sad it is when someone wants to give the heart a face-lift! And today, we use the word *face-lift* more than the word *heart*. How painful it is when someone wants to erase the "wrinkles" of so many encounters, of so much joy and sadness! The thought of when they advised the great Anna Magnani to get a face-lift, comes to mind. She said, "No, these wrinkles have cost me my entire life; they are precious."

In a certain sense this is one of the most dangerous, unwitting threats in the education of our adolescents: excluding them from their growth processes because adults take their place. And we find many adolescent parents, many. Adults who do not want to be adults and want to play at being adolescents forever. This "marginalization" can augment a natural tendency that young people have to isolate themselves or to stop their growth processes for lack of comparison. There is competition but no comparison.

Spiritual 'Gluttony'

I would not want to conclude without this aspect, which can be a key topic that intersects all the workshops that you will have: It is across the board. It is the theme of austerity. We are living in a context of very intense consumerism. And making a connection between consumerism and what I have just said: After food, medicine and clothing, which are essential for living, the highest spending is for beauty products, cosmetics. This is statistical! Cosmetics. It is awful to say this. And cosmetics, which used to be more about women, are now the same with both sexes.

After spending for basic things, the first thing is cosmetics and then mascots (companion animals): food, veterinarian ... These are statistics. But this is another topic, the one of pets, which I will not touch upon now: We will think about this further ahead.

But let us return to the topic of austerity. As I said, we are living in a context of intense consumerism. It seems that we are urged to consume consumption, in the sense that the important thing is to always consume. In the past, we used to say to those who had this problem that they were addicted to shopping. Nowadays, this is not said anymore.

We are all within this rhythm of consumerism. For this reason, it is urgent to recover that very important and undervalued spiritual principle: austerity. We have entered an abyss of consumerism, and we are induced to believe that we are valued according to what we are capable of producing and consuming, to what we are capable of having.

Educating in austerity is an incomparable richness. It awakens genius and creativity, generates opportunities for imagination and especially opens one to teamwork, in solidarity. It opens one to others. A type of "spiritual gluttony" exists. That attitude of gluttons who, instead of eating, devour all that surrounds them (they seem to gorge themselves as they eat).

I think it does us good to educate ourselves better as family about this "gluttony" and to make room for austerity as a way to meet one another, to build bridges, to open up spaces, to grow with and for others. This can be done only by one who knows how to be austere; otherwise he or she is simply a "glutton."

In *Amoris Laetitia* I said to you:

"The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union. Life together should not diminish but increase their contentment; every new step along the way can help couples find new ways to happiness" (No. 232).

To me it seems important to experience the education of children beginning from this perspective as a call the Lord makes to us, as family, to make this passage one of growth, in order to learn to better savor the life that he gives us.

This is what I thought to tell you on this theme.

[After Cardinal Vallini's thanks and the blessing:]

Thank you. Work well. I wish you all the best! Go forward!

Note

1 "For the young the future is long, the past short. In fact, at the start of the morning, there is nothing of the day to remember, while there is everything to hope. They are easy to deceive because of the reason mentioned; that is, because they readily hope. And they are more courageous, for they are full of passion and hope, and the former of these prevents them fearing, while the latter inspires them with confidence, for no one fears when angry, and hope of some advantage inspires confidence. And they are bashful" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, ii, 12:2). ■

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Sept. 18-21

National Convention of Hispanic Priests. Theme: "Priests, Teacher and Pastor on the Road to the Fifth Encuentro." Hyatt Regency Milwaukee. Milwaukee, Wis. www.ansh.org

Sept. 20-22

Interdisciplinary Symposium: "A Distinctive Vision? Catholic Higher Education 50 Years After Land O'Lakes." Sponsors: St. Louis University and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. St. Louis University. St. Louis, Mo. https://goo.gl/D5qKs3

Sept. 21-25

National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry Annual Meeting. Theme: "La Místeca de la Pastoral Juvenil Hispana: Evangelizar en Esta Nueva Época." Mexican American Catholic College. San Antonio, Texas. https://ncchmblog.wordpress.com

Sept. 22-24

Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Annual Convention. Theme: "Society and Citizenship: Current Challenges for the Church." Hyatt Regency Crystal City at Reagan National Airport. Arlington, Va. www.catholicscholars.org

Sept. 24-27

Annual Conference of the Diocesan Fiscal Management Conference. Baltimore Marriott Waterfront. Baltimore, Md. http://dfmconf.org

***Oct. 1-7**

World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea. Sponsor: Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Kaohsiang, Taiwan. www.vatican.va

***Oct. 3-5**

Federation of Pastoral Institutes (Federación de Institutos Pastorales) Annual Assembly. Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center. Chicago, Ill. http://fipusa.org

***Oct. 3-6**

Invitational World Congress: "Child Dignity in the Digital World." Sponsor: Pontifical Gregorian University Center for Child Protection. Rome, Italy. www.childdignity2017.org

*signifies new entry

On File

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, vice president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, asked bishops across the country to consider a special collection to assist victims of Hurricane Harvey along the Gulf Coast. He suggested in an Aug. 28 letter to bishops that the collection be taken during Masses the weekend of Sept. 2-3 or Sept. 9-10. "Our hearts and prayers go out to the families that have lost loved ones and to all who have lost homes and businesses along with their sense of normalcy. ... Our prayerful and financial support is urgently needed," he wrote. Funds collected will support emergency aid and recovery efforts under Catholic Charities USA and pastoral and rebuilding support to the affected dioceses through the bishops' conference.

Catholic politicians should be guided by the church's moral and social teachings when crafting legislation, Pope Francis said. Meeting with participants in the annual meeting of the International Catholic Legislators Network Aug. 27, the pope said that church teaching can contribute to a more humane and just society, but only if the church is allowed a voice in answering "the great questions of society in our time. The laws that you enact and apply ought to build bridges of dialogue between different political perspectives, also when responding to precise aims in order to promote greater care for the defenseless and the marginalized, especially toward the many who are forced to leave their countries, as well as to promote a correct human and natural ecology," the pope said, according to Vatican Radio.

A day after appealing for an end to the violent persecution of the Rohingya people, a Muslim minority in Myanmar, the Vatican announced Pope Francis will visit the country in late November. After the visit Nov. 27-30 to the cities of Yangon and Naypyitaw in Myanmar, the pope will travel on to Dhaka, Bangladesh, Nov. 30-Dec. 2, the Vatican said Aug. 28. After praying the Angelus with pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square Aug. 27, Pope Francis said he was saddened by the news "of the persecution of a religious minority, our Rohingya brothers and sisters." News media reported violent clashes Aug. 25-26 after Rohingya fighters attacked 30 police stations. More than 100 people, mostly insurgents, have been reported killed, according to the BBC. Most of the Rohingya population in Myanmar's Rakhine state have been denied citizenship in Myanmar, which is predominantly Buddhist. About 120,000 Rohingya are trapped in internally displaced person camps near the state capital, Sittwe. A further 400,000 live in the state's north, which is currently under martial law. Ucanews.com reported Aug. 29 that in June the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar suggested the pope not use the term *Rohingya* during his visit.