

through the Eucharist, to firmly maintain unity and foster charity. Acting with sovereign freedom, "according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, [he] gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church."<sup>36</sup> But *Lumen Gentium* continues: "Among these gifts the primacy belongs to the grace of the apostles to whose authority the Spirit himself subjects even those who are endowed with charisms."<sup>37</sup>

In this Trinitarian perspective, the figure of the bishop in the Church takes on a rich meaning that stems from the mystery in which it is rooted. I am sure that in these conferences you will contribute to an ever greater understanding of the episcopal ministry and, consequently, to the building up of the Church, to communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I offer all the participants in this Symposium my best wishes for a successful outcome to their work.

## Rome April 27, 1999

*Bishop Javier Echevarría gave this address at a symposium organized by the School of Social Communication at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.*

Esteemed professors and students of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. I would first like to extend a cordial welcome to all the participants in this symposium on "Communication and Places of Faith," and especially to the speakers, whose competence and availability have made possible these reflections on such an important topic for the spiritual life of Christians.

What do these "places of faith" represent for today's world? In all human realities, even the most common, we can discover signs of God's love for mankind, since the Word, in taking on human nature, has lived in close relation to these realities. The places that were sanctified by his bodily presence have become the "Holy Land," just as many other places where the mercy of God has been manifested have become "holy," often through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem, "places of great symbolic value," as Pope John Paul II has termed them<sup>1</sup> as well as Loreto, Guadalupe, Jasna Gora, Lourdes, Fatima, to cite only a few examples, are names very dear to believers because they are signs of God's nearness to man. The faithful are also drawn to places where God's holiness has been shown through the heroic correspondence of his saints, as confirmed by the Church's judgment.

In the history of the "places of faith" we see marvelously intertwined God's condescension and the docility of his creatures, who listen attentively to his voice, with their soul straining

36. *Ibid.*, 7/3.

37. *Ibid.*

1. Apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, November 10, 1994, no. 53.

to put his will into effect. As the Holy Father teaches, referring especially to Marian shrines, "the People of God, under the guidance of their pastors, are called to discern here the action of the Holy Spirit, who gives impetus to the Christian faith by making known Mary's face. It is he who works miracles in these places of Marian piety. It is he who, by fostering knowledge and love of Mary, leads the faithful to the school of the *Magnificat*, teaching them to read God's traces in history and to acquire the wisdom that converts every man and woman into a builder of a new humanity."<sup>2</sup>

Around these signs of God's action there has grown up a true pedagogy of the faith, based not only on the eloquence of the architecture and art or the beauty of the surroundings, but also, and above all, on the liturgy and spirituality that are found there, on the catechesis and the innumerable works of charity that take place there.

Let us now turn to the topic that will occupy us for the next two days, centered around the figure of the "communicator" at the service of the event of faith and the message he has been invited to transmit, usually through the media. Although it is not my place to go into this important topic in depth, I would like to refer briefly to my own personal experience, in particular the various occasions when I had the privilege of accompanying Opus Dei's Founder, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, and his first successor Bishop Álvaro del Portillo on visits to many places of worship and of prayer.

To avoid taking up too much time, I will limit myself to some brief reflections on three focal points of Christian piety: Marian shrines, other places of faith, and the Holy Land.

2. By God's grace, I was with the Founder of Opus Dei during his journeys to pray at Marian shrines in various countries of Europe and the Americas, which he visited up until the moment of his holy death, on June 26, 1975. Blessed Josemaría went to these sites with a Catholic heart, in search of a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus and his Blessed Mother Mary. He went as a penitent pilgrim, seeking to give thanks for so many gifts that he had received and to benefit from the mystery of grace and mercy shown in those places. I want to emphasize that he did not make these pilgrimages to Lourdes, Loreto or Guadalupe, for example, moved solely by his personal piety. His frequent visits to our Lady had a deep ecclesial dimension, because in those places he felt the heart of Catholicism beating strongly and he showed himself a son of the Church who prayed to his Mother, Mary Most Holy, for the needs of his brothers and sisters of all times. When the pilgrimage destinations were distant, his trips also took on a broad pastoral meaning, because they gave him the opportunity to meet a great many people in contact with Opus Dei's apostolic work. I can't recall without being moved his farewell to our Lady of Guadalupe, in 1970, when the Founder of Opus Dei prayed alongside thousands of people who wanted to accompany him in his prayer in that Marian shrine.

2. Pope John Paul II, Address to a general audience, November 15, 1995.

I also remember how he drank with pious reverence the water of Lourdes and how recollected he used to be in the holy house of Loreto, always moved by the thought that within those walls constructed by human hands the prodigy of the Incarnation had taken place. I also recall that in the new shrine of Torreciudad, born of his faith, his gratitude to the Mother of God and his great priestly soul, he wanted to have a place expressly dedicated to reconciliation, with many confessionals, emphasizing in this way that the miracles he hoped for from our Lady were, above all, spiritual ones. He knew that the most important miracles would be those worked in the interior of people's consciences, reconciling them with God through the sacrament of penance, although obviously he never excluded the possibility of extraordinary interventions by divine providence. As the Holy Father wrote in the Bull convoking the Jubilee, we find ourselves facing the "vigorous language which the divine pedagogy of salvation uses to lead man to conversion and penance."<sup>3</sup>

On these trips, especially frequent in the last years of his life, Blessed Josemaría never went with the attitude of a tourist. These visits always responded to an apostolic and pastoral demand. He was interested in history, which he knew deeply, and he loved artistic and natural beauties. But his zeal and spirit of service always moved him to put in first place the needs of the Church and of souls, for whom he spent himself unservedly.

In this spirit Blessed Josemaría went to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela to venerate the relics of the apostle; to Ars to seek the intercession of the holy curé; to Bari, to ask St. Nicholas for help in obtaining the human instruments needed for the apostolate; to Turin, to pray before the Shroud.

Unfortunately, he was never able to fulfill his great desire to go to the places where the Redeemer's earthly life transpired. This aspiration of his was carried out, instead, by his successor Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, exactly one week before his death. From the 17 to the 22 of March in 1994 we visited the Holy Land together. They were days of intense prayer for the needs of the Church and for the Holy Father and his intentions. In each of the places that we visited, following the custom of the ancient pilgrims, we read the corresponding texts of the Gospel, so often meditated upon by Don Álvaro in his personal prayer.

After fulfilling those acts of Christian devotion we tried, as our beloved Founder had taught us, to "enter into" the Gospel as though we were taking part in each of the scenes. To get to know Jesus, Blessed Josemaría explained, "you must try to know his life—reading the Gospel and meditating on the scenes of the New Testament—in order to understand the divine meaning of his life on earth. In our own life we must reproduce Christ's life. We need to come to know him by reading and meditating on Scripture, and by praying."<sup>4</sup>

3. Pope John Paul II, Bull *Incarnationis Mysterium*, November 29, 1998, no. 2.

4. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 14.

3. There is, therefore, a thread uniting all of these places. "In speaking of the origins of my priestly vocation," writes John Paul II in *Gift and Mystery*, "I cannot overlook its Marian thread... At the time when my priestly vocation was developing, a change took place in my understanding of devotion to the Mother of God. I was already convinced that *Mary leads us to Christ*, but at that time I began to realize also that *Christ leads us to his Mother*."<sup>5</sup>

The man and woman of today seeks, at times perhaps unconsciously, to make direct contact with God. People are seeking credible witnesses more than "convincing" arguments. Therefore the places of faith, with an ever-widening radius of action spreading out in concentric circles, can be places for growth in prayer and in sacramental life, places for reconciliation with God and for strengthening bonds of human fraternity, places for catechesis and a deeper assimilation of Christian doctrine.

What do we expect of those who work in the communications field and who freely take on tasks in this area? In the first place, *professionalism*. It is necessary to "know how to think" and to "know how to do," so that one's relationship with the means of communication will be based on a systematic preparation, and not mere enthusiasm, which runs the risk of flickering out as quickly as it is ignited. The world of communication today is situated within a specific scientific framework that cannot be ignored. A certain amount of personal enthusiasm, put at the service of the message of faith of which

one is the bearer, undoubtedly does no harm. But at the same time the virtues and human qualities proper to daily life are also necessary, without this implying any disordered pursuit of success or personal affirmation. Trust and respect are won through work that is well done, through the seriousness and competence with which one carries out one's mission; for example, when one does not limit oneself to giving information about what the Church is *doing*, but also about *why* she is doing it. Also loyalty and unity with the ecclesiastical authority that has the canonical and pastoral responsibility for these places of faith, combined with respect for subordinates and collaborators, confers human quality on one's own work and makes it worthy of being offered to God.

In the second place, *credibility* is necessary, a fruit of one's own moral and professional qualities and a spirit of service that leads one to seek the good of those one is speaking to, whether this involves special representatives for a particular event, or the apparently anonymous mass of pilgrims filling a specific site. This sometimes requires knowing how to distinguish between what is only *urgent* and what is truly *important*, in order to program one's work in terms of the latter, with prudence, order and perseverance.

Lastly, but most important, a personal *life of faith* is needed to give the seal of authenticity and consistency to one's own work. Speaking to others about God, in all the various contexts within the Church, should not be based on purely human tech-

5. John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 1996, pp. 27-28.

niques or abilities. Communicating an experience of faith requires, to some degree, knowing oneself to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and thus being docile to his inspirations. We need to pay attention to the Holy Spirit's voice and suggestions, with a sincere and authentic life of piety, leaving the fruit of our work in God's

hands, and with the joy of knowing ourselves to be a child of God.

In the hope that the sessions of this symposium will shed new light in benefit of a more efficacious work in communicating the faith, I wish all of you a fruitful stay at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

## Articles and Interviews

### *El Imparcial*, Hermosillo February 11, 1999

*The complete text of the interview granted to the newspaper "El Imparcial" in Hermosillo, Mexico, published under the title "Is America the hope for the new Millennium?"*

*This is the first time that a Pope has convoked Synods of Bishops for the various continents. Why do you think he did so?*

Obviously, all of the Synods, including the continental ones, have an apostolic purpose, and the Holy Father, as you know, is constantly encouraging evangelization. This spirit of bringing Christ everywhere requires taking into consideration the history, culture, traditions, etc., of the different continents.

Thus the continental Synods serve to identify and to initiate the ways of evangelizing appropriate to

the particular circumstances of each time and place. They are an instrument of unity and renewal of the Church's apostolic spirit.

In the case of the Synod for the Americas, the Pope pointed out three principle aims: a new evangelization, solidarity between the particular churches, and the casting of a Christian light on the problems of justice and the economic relations among the nations of the Americas.

The sessions held in Rome in the months of November and December 1997 were a prelude to the intense dialogues that took place throughout 1998. The most pressing topics for the Americas were tackled: the drug problem, corruption, the religious sects, and attacks against the family. All of these are a cause for concern because they affect the work of the Church and people's spiritual life. There was also detailed discussion of "a new evangelization."

*Can you explain to us in a general way the nature of your participation in the sessions that took place in Rome?*