

The sacrament of Reconciliation is the sacrament of joy. We Christians live joyfully because we know ourselves to be children of God, very dear children. With the joy of their life, with their optimism, Christians have to be reminders, in all places, that in Jesus can be found all of the answers to the most profound yearnings of the heart of man.

Let us entrust to our Lady, Mother of Christ and our Mother, all of the supernatural fruit that we want to ripen in these years because of the Jubilee of our Redeemer. Holy Mother, may the will of God be fulfilled in each one of us. May the earth be opened to the universal call to sanctity. May this profound and joyful transformation take place in many hearts, which welcoming Christ, gives a new meaning to life! "Sancta Mater, istud agas!" (From the *Stabat Mater* sequence of the feast of our Lady of Sorrows).

Il Messaggero June 26, 1997

THE SECRET MEANING OF THE JUBILEE

From the very beginning of his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope John Paul II has called the Church and all humanity to look toward the Jubilee of the year 2000. In the mind of the Holy Father this milestone is much more than the

commemoration of a dividing line in the flow of history. The Pope has indicated that the preparation for the Jubilee constitutes the key to the meaning of his whole pontificate. Only in its light can we contemplate the legacy of the Pope.

In the writings of the Holy Father—I am thinking now of his *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*—we frequently find the affirmation that "Christianity is a religion of salvation." At the basis of his reflections on the meaning of the Jubilee we find the recognition of the existence of evil, which in all of its forms wounds our life, and also the need for the pardon which Jesus Christ offers us through the Church. But we also find the sure hope of salvation, an innate Christian optimism that projects upon the Jubilee the light of an undying joy. The Jubilee year, in effect, is a year of interior rebirth. It is in a reconciliation with God and with all men and women that one discovers the principal manifestation of that joy which the word 'Jubilee' evokes.

We have to be clear about the meaning of Christian conversion. On the one hand, it is repentance and pardon; on the other, it is hope and dedication. It is sometimes forgotten that both these aspects are equally saturated with the profound peace that only can be found in God.

In Jesus the love of God for humanity is revealed as a love capable of an infinite patience. Christ presents himself to the world as the redeemer who not only pardons, but who cancels the evil, dissolves the

shadows of our soul, regenerates. Someone has written that it is the absolute mercy of the Christian God that is the most convincing proof of his omnipotence. There are no limits to his forgiveness because his is love itself without limit, a love so great that it puts up with everything and pardons everything.

“Son, your sins are forgiven you” (Mk 2:5). The certainty of forgiveness granted by Jesus with expressions of disarming tenderness to the paralytic, to the adulterous woman, to the good thief, to Peter, fill the conscience of every Christian with joy when, in the sacrament of Confession, the voice of the priest pronounces the formula of absolution: “I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” It is not the priest who is pardoning us, it is God himself who is welcoming us.

Nevertheless, the essence of Christian morality is not guilt. It is time to clear away these errors which are as deeply rooted as they are false. History, even recent history with its genocidal massacres, shows the emptiness of the radiant promises of the ideologues of a purely earthly salvation. Only that God who suffered on the cross can save suffering humanity and give it the happiness which the world cannot give. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá wrote: “Consider what depths of mercy lie in the justice of God! For, according to human justice, he who pleads guilty is punished, but in the divine court, he is pardoned. Blessed be the holy sacrament of Penance!” (*The Way*, no.

309). What I would like to stress now is that divine pardon moves us to look to the future, rather than the past. The sacrament of Confession is a sacrament of joy, the beginning of a new birth, a new point of departure, an invitation to rediscover the hope of being able to really live a new life, that is, of being able to begin again. The clarity with which the Holy Father, in his *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, pointed to the liberation from sin, and the choice of the good as the two sources of the road to conversion, should give us something to meditate about. Conversion is born from sorrow, but culminates in hope and in the experience of the good. Joy is the patrimony of those who know themselves to be children of God and want to live as such.

The Jubilee, therefore, constitutes above all an occasion to take up once more, in a fully consistent way, our Christian witness. Reflection on forgiveness gives the lie to the obsession that Christianity is a morality of prohibitions, and that therefore the life of the Christian is reduced to a series of renunciations and frustrating duties. Christ, God become man, is the perfect man. To follow Jesus means to realize oneself humanly. It means authentic happiness, not only in heaven, but also on earth. Liberation from the remains of that egoism, distrust, and suspicion encrusted on our character because of our surrender to evil; interior freedom and the ability to communicate to others all of the good that has been given to us and for which we have been created: this, in a word, is the true experience of the Christian.

Nevertheless, both faith and experience reject the mirage—a perennial temptation of all ideologies—of the reign of good here on earth. The Christian begins again each day. He or she is always beginning a new journey, looking ahead, falling again and again, but—because he believes in Christ's salvation—never failing to get up again. This does not eliminate evil from the world. There will never be total peace on earth; therefore we always have to practice the lesson of forgiveness. Only when men and women, forgiven their errors which are never lacking, learn to forgive every time they suffer an injury; only when peoples and nations—men and women, after all—become capable of forgiving, will the path of peace on earth recommence in history.

How often the Holy Father is moved to preach, to beg pardon among adversaries, and to make himself present in territories lacerated by the conflicts of our time. His insistence in so many documents on a “notable reduction if not a complete cancellation of the international debt, which burdens so heavily the fate of many nations” is not ingenuous. It is in forgiveness, in effect, that we find the sign of a path of reconciliation that always presupposes sincerity, that is to say, the recognition of the responsibility that rests upon all people and all nations. And it is in this mature assumption of responsibility, in this positive decision to do everything within our power to improve things, beginning with ourselves, that one finds the difference between hope and the falsehood of the earthly utopias.

Pastoral Trips

Ivory Coast

During his trip to the Ivory Coast, from April 2 to 6, 1997, the Prelate of Opus Dei had occasion of going to all of the Centers of the Prelature, was informed of the apostolic initiatives of the faithful of Opus Dei there. He met with thousands of people in public and private gatherings, encouraging them to intensify their desires for personal sanctity and for service to the Church and to society.

Bishop Echevarría arrived at the Felix Houphouët-Bogny Airport in Abidjan on April 2 at 5 pm. While there he resided at the seat of the Delegation in Abidjan.

On April 3 the Prelate visited Archbishop, Bernard Agré, whom he has known for years. Later he met with the Papal Nuncio, Bishop Luigi Ventura. Bishop Ventura expressed his joy at seeing the Prelate in Africa, a land the which Holy Father sees as taking a great role in the future of the Church. “They are waiting for us in