

with whom we come in contact; the professional prestige that our work done for the glory of God brings; the testimony of a Christian life lived to the full; the opportune word that brings consolation to those who are suffering and encourages those around us to strive for the goal of sanctity.

This is a good moment for each of us to ask ourselves: Do I try to draw many souls to God by my prayer, sacrifice and deeds?<sup>14</sup> Do I speak about God with my friends and colleagues, without fear or embarrassment? Do I invite them to make use of a priest's ministry in confession to regain their friendship with our Lord, their full

dignity as children of God? Thus we ourselves will also share in the spiritual paternity to which Jesus referred when he said: *Here are my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.*<sup>15</sup>

Let us ask our Lady to show us the path to the spiritual fruitfulness that she attained, together with her physical maternity, so fully with Jesus. Holy Mary, the beloved daughter of the Father, will teach us, as she did Blessed Josemaría, how to help many souls discover that they are children of God, and her own children as well, and to act accordingly. Amen.

## Discourses

### Rome March 15, 1999

*Bishop Javier Echevarría presided, as Chancellor, at the opening ceremony of the Fifth International Theological Symposium organized by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, on "The bishops and their ministry." During the ceremony, he gave the following address.*

Reverend Fathers,  
Professors and students taking part in this symposium,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Church, a pilgrim on this earth and constantly journeying towards its definitive realization in the glory of heaven, seems to be accelerating its pace, urged on by the Holy Spirit, as we approach the transition from the second to the third millennium of the Christian Era. The preparation for this event, so full of symbolism and hope, is a challenge addressed to everyone in the Church. An important aspect of this is the call to deepen our understanding of what the Church is and believes through contemplation and study, and the presentation of the truth by the magisterium.<sup>1</sup>

14. Cf. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 82.

15. *Mt* 12:49-50.

1. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Dei Verbum*, November 18, 1965, no. 8.

Many initiatives blend together in this work of enriching our understanding of doctrine and ecclesial life. Among them, a special place is held by the research and study carried out in academic institutions, whether in Rome or in so many other places, by means of congresses, study sessions, etc. Included in this wide-ranging effort are the international symposia organized by the School of Theology of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, of which the fifth is now taking place.

This year's theme, which is inspiring the reflection of the whole Church, will receive special attention in the upcoming ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. In this context, the presentations and exchange of views that will take place in the two days of this Symposium can also make its contribution to this reflection.

In the words of Blessed Josemaría, "the Church is rooted in this fundamental mystery of our Catholic faith, the mystery of God who is one in essence and three in persons."<sup>2</sup> Thus an adequate theology of the episcopate must try to situate it within the light radiating from the mystery of the Trinity. The following paragraph of an address by our Holy Father John Paul II seems relevant in this regard: "The bishop is an image of the Father. He makes Christ present as the Good

Shepherd, and receives the plenitude of the Holy Spirit from which blossom teachings and ministerial initiatives to build up, in the image of the Trinity, through the word and the sacraments, the Church, the place of God's gift to the faithful who have been entrusted to him."<sup>3</sup> If we view the Church in the perspective of the well-known expression of St. Cyprian quoted by the Second Vatican Council, as "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,"<sup>4</sup> then we must also look at the bishop in that same Trinitarian light.

1. "The bishop is an image of the Father." This beautiful affirmation by the Pope echoes St. Ignatius of Antioch.<sup>5</sup> It is not an isolated statement by the holy martyr; he repeats the same idea in other places in his letters,<sup>6</sup> and even goes so far as to say that God the Father of Jesus Christ is "everyone's bishop."<sup>7</sup> The bishop is, then, an icon of the Father, as a projection of his paternity on earth. As we read in St. Paul's letter to the Christians at Ephesus: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."<sup>8</sup>

Thus the "paternal office," as the episcopal mission is defined by the Second Vatican Council,<sup>9</sup> cannot have

2. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Homily "The Supernatural Aim of the Church," May 28, 1972, in *In Love with the Church*, Scepter, 1989, no. 17.

3. Pope John Paul II, Address to the bishops of Colombia, July 2, 1986, no. 2 (AAS 79 [1987] 66).

4. St. Cyprian, *De Oratione Dominica*, 23: PL 4, 553, cited in Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

5. Cf. *Letter to the Tralians* III, 3 (Bernard M. Peebles [ed.] "Ignatius of Antioch," collection *The Apostolic Fathers*, CUA Press, Washington, 1981, p. 103).

6. Cf. *Letter to the Magnesians* II, 2-3; *Letter to the Smyrneans* VI, 8 ( *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 121).

7. *Letter to the Magnesians* II, 3 ( *op. cit.*, p. 97).

8. *Eph* 3:14-15.

9. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 21/1.

any meaning other than that of making present the figure of the Father. In fact, the bishop, and I cite once more the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, is "sent . . . by the Father to govern his family."<sup>10</sup>

Every bishop can and should find in these words many practical consequences for his life. Nevertheless, rather than preaching an exhortation, I would like to reflect further here on some other aspects of this relationship of the figure of the bishop to God the Father.

The Gospels unfailingly present the life of Christ as completely dedicated to fulfilling the will of the Father and making him known, as Father, to mankind. The encounter with Christ in the Church, especially through listening faithfully to the word of God and participating in the sacraments, is the path to reach the Father. The sacramental nature of the Church makes possible and guarantees the meeting with Christ, in a particularly efficacious way, beneath the sacramental signs. But the Father, in his wise and loving plan of salvation, has wanted to make his paternity visible in some way in the Church through the apostolic ministry, principally through the episcopate, the fullness of the sacrament of orders.

The fact that the Church is a family, with a common Father—we are "members of the household of God,"<sup>11</sup> says St. Paul—is reflected in its visible organization, in which a

paternal function is apparent. Every bishop, and the Pope even more so as head of the college of bishops, constitutes a permanent, visible reference to the paternity of God with respect to the Church; of a Father to whom it directs itself unceasingly in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, in a dialogue of praise and thanksgiving, of petition and reparation.

2. The quote from John Paul II that provided us with the thread for these reflections adds that the bishop "makes Christ present as the Good Shepherd." In this regard we can return to the letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch, in which he exhorts our brothers and sisters in the first days of the Church to remain subject "to the bishop as to Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup> And he writes in another passage, "Jesus Christ, the life that cannot be taken from us, is the mind of the Father, and the bishops appointed to the ends of the earth are of one mind with Jesus Christ."<sup>13</sup>

Certainly the bishops, in union with the priests, make Christ present in a preeminent way in the Holy Eucharist. But Christ's presence extends in various ways to the whole episcopal ministry. Thus the Second Vatican Council, when explaining the sacramentality of the episcopate, started with Christ's operative presence in the bishops. "The Lord Jesus Christ . . . through their signal service . . . preaches the Word of God to all peoples and administers to the faithful unceasingly the sacraments of faith; . . . through their paternal care he incorporates, by

10. *Ibid.*, 27/3.

11. *Eph* 2:19.

12. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Trallians* III, 2 (*op. cit.*, p. 102).

13. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians*, I, 3 (*op. cit.*, p. 88).

a supernatural rebirth, new members into his body; . . . finally, through their wisdom and prudence he directs and guides the people of the New Testament on their journey towards eternal beatitude.”<sup>14</sup>

The deep reality of the Church, perceptible only to eyes of faith, immeasurably transcends the categories of human society. The Church is the Body of Christ, who is its Head. He diffuses his life among the faithful, his members, who are called to become like Him. Christ guides the Church with his efficacious presence from within, and not from a distance. The ways in which he is present are multiple and of varying intensity. Through the bishops, Christ continually carries out his function as Good Shepherd. He speaks of this reality in especially moving terms that spring from the inexhaustible fountain of his love, shown above all in the sacrificial gift of his life: *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.... I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.*<sup>15</sup>

Christ wanted there to be shepherds in his Church so that his always effective presence would be visible through human persons as well. In this way, the faithful would experience the truth of St. Peter's words in his first Epistle: *For you were straying like sheep,*

*but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian* (the Neovulgate uses “episcopum here,” faithfully following the Greek text) *of your souls.*<sup>16</sup> In the bishop they find Christ. In fact, “bishops, in a resplendent and visible manner, take the place of Christ himself, teacher, shepherd and priest, and act as his representatives.”<sup>17</sup>

3. The Pope's words that are guiding our reflection, after affirming that the bishop makes Christ present as Good Shepherd, tell us that the bishop “receives the plenitude of the Holy Spirit from which blossom teachings and ministerial initiatives.” This gift of the Spirit is expressed in the central moment of the ordination prayer of the bishop, in the epiclesis: “Pour forth now upon this chosen one, O Father, the power that comes from you, your Spirit who governs and guides (*Spiritum principalem*); you have given it to your beloved Son Jesus Christ and he has transmitted it to the holy apostles.”<sup>18</sup>

In St. Paul's discourse to the elders of the Church from Ephesus, he said: *Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood.*<sup>19</sup> In this pastoral work, the direction and efficacy stem from the Holy Spirit, with the obvious condition that the bishop be in harmony with Him and docilely support his action, as the Pope teaches in the address referred to above: “This is why

14. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 21/1.

15. Jn 10:11, 14-16.

16. 1 Pet 2:25.

17. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 21/2.

18. Pontificale Romanum, *De Ordinatione Episcopi, Presbyterorum et Diaconorum*.

19. Acts 20:28.

the bishop receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit in his ordination as bishop: to be a collaborator in the ecclesial mission proper to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> What is important here is the logic of faith, as Blessed Josemaría has so well expressed it: “What is most important in the Church is not how we humans react but how God acts.”<sup>21</sup>

The effusion of the Spirit is a particular gift to the person of the bishop, as St. Paul says when writing to Timothy: *I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.*<sup>22</sup> These gifts are given by the Paraclete, who is himself the principal Gift bestowed by the laying on of hands. Therefore, a little further on, St. Paul adds: *guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.*<sup>23</sup>

4. All of these gifts, as the Pope says in the paragraph cited above, are given so that the bishop can “build up, in the image of the Trinity, through the word and the sacraments, the Church, the place of God’s gift to the faithful who have been entrusted to him.” All the faithful of the Church are entrusted to each bishop insofar as he, through ordination, is incorporated into the college of bishops and assumes the *sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*. This concern is inseparable

from the specific ecclesial mission assigned to him, whether as the head of a particular Church, or some other pastoral office of an episcopal nature.<sup>24</sup>

The “image of the Trinity” refers both to the action of the bishop who builds up the Church, and to the Church which is built up. It refers to the bishop’s action in furthering the divine action, whose source is God the Father. The Father acts through his incarnate Son, to whom has been given all power in heaven and on earth;<sup>25</sup> and with the Son He gives his Spirit to unite his chosen ones in the communion of Trinitarian life. The bishop then is an instrument and icon of our Trinitarian God, who constantly unites around himself his people, which is the Church.<sup>26</sup> The image of the three Divine Persons, in the unity of their operation, is visibly projected, in a mysterious way, in the bishop and in his ministerial work.

The image of the Trinity also refers to the Church, which has its source, its model, and its end in God. This means that the Church is built upon the communion that is born as a participation in the communion of the three Divine Persons.<sup>27</sup> As St. John proclaims in his first Epistle, the communion of the Church transcends the horizontal dimension of human harmony: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and

20. John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of Colombia, July 2, 1986, no. 4 (AAS 79 [1987] 67).

21. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 131.

22. 2 Tim 1:6-7.

23. 2 Tim 1:14.

24. Cf. John Paul II, *Motu proprio, Apostolos Suos*, May 21, 1998, no. 12. “There are many bishops who, although carrying out functions proper to a bishop, do not preside over a particular Church” (*Ibid.*, note 55).

25. Cf. Mt 28:18.

26. Cf. *Missale Romanum*, Prex Eucharistica III: “*Populum tibi congregare non desinis.*”

27. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter Communionis Notio*, May 28, 1992, nos. 3-6.

our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

In what way is God's paternity seen as built up in the Church by the bishop's action? In the first place, because “it is the right of bishops to admit newly elected members into the episcopal body by means of the sacrament of Orders.”<sup>29</sup> In this way there will never be lacking in the Church bishops, who are images of God the Father. In addition, through priestly ordination, bishops make priests participants in the divine paternity, in their role as collaborators with the order of bishops. Thus the Second Vatican Council, although it exhorted all priests to recognize the bishop as their father and to obey him with respect,<sup>30</sup> nevertheless also affirmed that “the priests of the new law by reason of the sacrament of Orders fulfill the preeminent and essential function of father and teacher among the People of God.”<sup>31</sup> Thanks to the ministry of the bishops, the Church's hierarchical structure contains a paternal dimension, an image of God's paternity. In addition, all human and Christian paternity in the Church, beginning with that of Christian spouses, is sustained by the episcopal ministry which builds up the Church.

In the same way, the Church is built up by the ministry of the bishop in the image of Christ its Head and Redeemer, above all because “all the members must be formed in his like-

ness, until Christ be formed in them.”<sup>32</sup> Undoubtedly the docility of each of the faithful to the Holy Spirit's action is irreplaceable in this work; but it is also certain that no one can dispense with the Church's ministry of the word and the sacraments. The bishops “by the ministry of the word . . . impart to those who believe, the strength of God unto salvation (cf. *Rom* 1:16), and through the sacraments, the frequent and fruitful distribution of which they regulate by their authority, they sanctify the faithful.”<sup>33</sup>

Finally, we can ask ourselves: how is the Church built up by the bishop's ministry in the image of the Trinity in respect to the Holy Spirit? To answer this, the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* once more comes to our aid: “In order that we might be unceasingly renewed in him (cf. *Eph* 4:23), he has shared with us his Spirit who, being one and the same in head and members, give life to, unifies and moves the whole body. Consequently, his work could be compared by the Fathers to the function that the principle of life, the soul, fulfills in the human body.”<sup>34</sup> The Church is built up in the image of the Holy Spirit because, animated by the Spirit, it lives to “proclaim and establish among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God.”<sup>35</sup> The Spirit makes use of the bishops to always conserve the Gospel integrally as a living reality, to sanctify the faithful by means of the sacraments, and above all

28. 1 Jn 1:3.

29. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 21.

30. *Ibid.*, no. 28.

31. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9; cf. Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28.

32. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 7/5.

33. *Ibid.*, 26/3; cf. 25/1.

34. *Ibid.*, 7/7.

35. *Ibid.*, 5/2.

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.