

cal *Laborem Exercens*, will bring about a great liberation. This message is none other than the divine value hidden in the most ordinary circumstances of work when it is carried out with a desire to serve, to contribute to social development, to fraternity, to the restoration of justice, in short, to establishing that "civilization of love" of which Pope Paul VI spoke.

L'Osservatore Romano June 26, 1997

Two articles by the Prelate of Opus Dei relating to the first year of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 were published on June 26, 1997. "L'Osservatore Romano" published "Rediscovering the Merciful Love of Christ." The newspaper "Il Messagero" of Rome published his article entitled "The Secret Meaning of the Jubilee."

REDISCOVERING THE MERCIFUL LOVE OF CHRIST

The apostles had the opportunity of living with Jesus for three years. Three years which, for all of them except the one who betrayed him, represented a radical transformation in their lives. The proximity to the Master, the opportunity to contemplate his example and to listen to his teaching, their personal friendship with Jesus, who taught them to deal with their Father God as his children,

and finally the descent upon them of the Holy Spirit, transformed them.

In thinking about the three years of preparation for the Jubilee, the thought of those three years the apostles spent close to Jesus comes frequently to mind. With God's grace, these coming three years can be for us a similar opportunity if we try to seek and befriend Jesus.

It is in this way that we will accept in our lives the invitation that Pope John Paul II makes to us in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*: we will take advantage of this great opportunity to get closer to Jesus, the Word of God and the Redeemer of Mankind, by commemorating his incarnation and birth. In this regard I like to recall that Blessed Josemaría Escrivá used to say that Jesus "is not a figure who has passed away, he is not a remembrance who is lost in history," but a Person who is alive and always present.

The help of grace

The Pope exhorts us to dedicate to Jesus the year 1997, the first of the preparatory phase of the Jubilee (see *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 40). And the Holy Father wanted to remind us that to be a Christian does not simply mean to follow a doctrine or to submit oneself to a few particular rules of conduct. The Christian follows Jesus Christ, he tries to know and love him. St. Paul summed it up with an expression that has the radicalness of an authentic witness: "Only one thing is necessary: that you live a life worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (*Phil 1:27*).

To reproduce in our own lives the life of Jesus Christ, this is the ideal of Christians. We know it is a goal that is beyond us; it exceeds our powers and has no relation to our merits; but "grace is sufficient for us" (see 2: *Cor* 12:9) and we cannot give up striving for it.

Every effort to follow Christ, to imitate him, to identify ourselves with him, is in vain if we do not count on the grace of God. As a consequence of sin, man is held back by a wounded nature, and in his heart great ideals are mixed with wretched tendencies. We are not being pessimistic by recalling these truths. Christians are the most optimistic of men and women, because we recognize the power of grace and the mercy of God. But we are not ingenuous: we know that we are sinners.

From the recognition of our own limitations humility is born. From this blossoms, in a natural way, the need to seek God's help. Therefore, Christian life requires an assiduous and constant meditation on Sacred Scripture — especially on the New Testament—, in personal prayer. It requires a spirit of mortification and a meeting with Christ in the sacrament of Penance, which washes and purifies us. And it demands, above all, the intimate contact with our Lord truly present — alive!— in the Holy Eucharist. The dynamism of Christian life should be configured as a free and generous response of the individual to the impulses of the Holy Spirit.

Christians trust in the action of grace in the soul, in the presence of

the Holy Spirit in history. That is the motive for hope that enabled St. Augustine to exclaim: "Let us live well (Christianly) and the times will be good. We are the times. As we ourselves are, thus will the times be" (*Sermon*, 80, 8).

Christ is passing by

The celebration of the year 2000 is inseparably united to the great theme of evangelization. Perhaps occasionally the following questions have come to mind: Why isn't the work of evangelization more fruitful? Why can't we present to non-believers a convincing proposition? Why, after two thousand years, are there so many who do not know Jesus? Why isn't the balance of these twenty centuries more positive?

"There would not be a single pagan if we were truly Christians." Perhaps these words of St. John Chrysostom (*In Epistolam I ad Timotheum Homiliae*, 10, 3) do not have all the possible answers to the anxieties that we have just mentioned. But they do point up admirably the apostolic responsibilities of Catholics. To be truly Christian means to try to identify ourselves with Jesus. It means to be *Christ who is passing by*. It is not enough for a Christian to be *respected* and *honest* in work, family and social relationships. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, all of our conduct has to make Christ present among men and women.

From this point of view the questions that were formulated above can be rephrased thus: Can the peo-

ple with whom we live easily discover Christ in us, or must they make an effort to recognize him in our conduct, because we hide him with attitudes of laziness, egoism, unpleasantness? Are we for others light, consolation, relaxation, stimulus, help? Do our colleagues in class or at work receive the light of Christ, his understanding and his demands from us?

These questions and others like them can come before us in the intimacy of prayer, because they help us to carry out the work of examining our conscience, which in turn gives rise to concrete, consistent, and demanding resolutions. These resolutions help us to feel responsible for this epoch in which we are called to live. Christians must continue to be leaven, not so much as teachers, but more as witnesses, fully immersed in all the noble realities, professions, ideals, enthusiasms and preoccupations of our fellow citizens, with whom we want to build society and culture.

The father of the prodigal son

Tertio Millennio Adveniente offers a beautiful meditation on the parable of the prodigal son, who symbolizes the path of conversion to which all Christians are called. Meditation on these pages of the Gospel (see *Lk* 15: 11-32) fills us with grateful admiration for the love of God our Father.

It is always a time for conversion. In the parable we are told of the path of *two sons*, and both of them needed to be converted. The younger because he used his freedom to separate him-

self from the love of his father, seeking happiness in the wrong place, finding only bitterness. And the elder because he had remained close to his father with a love that lacked freedom, more like a distant servant than like a good son and brother.

The parable does not show us a third son who did not need conversion. Our Lord wanted us to understand that all of us, without exception, have to nurture in our soul the search for love, the rejection of our egoistic self. As St. Augustine teaches, "Christ came for the sick and he found everyone sick," to such an extent that "to believe that one is well is the worst malady" (*Sermon* 80, 4 and 3). We all have to be converted every day. And for all of us this time of preparation for the Jubilee of the year 2000 is a great opportunity for "personal conversion and renewal" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 42).

The sacrament of Penance is the most sure means of conversion. These words of Pope John Paul II are an appropriate reminder: "The confessionals that are spread across the world where men and women show their own sins do not speak of the severity of God, but rather of his goodness and mercy. And all of those who approach the confessional, sometimes after many years and with a great weight of sins, find, at the moment of ridding themselves of them, the desired relief. They find the joy and the serenity of conscience, which aside from confession cannot be found anywhere else" (Pope John Paul II, *Homily*, March 16, 1980).

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