

parish of Our Lady of the Martyrs in Marginone de Altopascio, with this dedication of a chapel enriched with a beautiful statue by the sculptor Barsanti, is a symbol of how the message of holiness that he spread by means of the Prelature of Opus Dei is attracting men and women of all places and walks of life, awakening in them the desire to be consistent with the demands of their Christian life, striving to give witness to Christ and to serve the Church, of which the Prelature is a small portion. It gives me special pleasure that the parish of Marginone is dedicated to our Lady. Saint

Josemaría told us never to forget that Mary is, at the same time, Mother of God and our Mother, the Mother of each one of us. He invited us to love her tenderly. He often said that Mary is the easiest and quickest path to reach Christ. And he wrote: "To Jesus we always go, and to him we always return, through Mary" (*The Way*, no. 495).

I unite myself spiritually to your intentions in this Eucharistic celebration, and especially to your prayers for peace, to which the Holy Father has called the world so insistently in recent times.

Articles and Interviews

Miami April 4-11, 2004

*Commentaries on Holy Week
broadcast by the EWTN radio
network*

PALM SUNDAY
APRIL 4, 2004

Holy Week is beginning, and we recall Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. St. Luke tells us: "As they approached Bethpage and Bethany, near the hill named after the Olive Trees, he sent two of his disciples telling them: 'Go to the village opposite you. As you enter, you will find a young donkey on which no one has ridden yet. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you why you are untying it, say to them: the Lord needs it.' They went and found everything as the Lord had told them."

What a humble animal our Lord chose to ride upon! Perhaps we, in our conceit, would have chosen a spirited stallion. But Jesus does not let himself be guided by purely human reasoning, but by divine criteria. "This happened," St. Matthew notes, "so that the words of the prophet might be fulfilled: 'Tell the daughter of Zion, behold your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

Jesus, who is God, is happy with a young donkey for a throne. We, who are nothing, are so often vain and proud, seeking to stand out, to attract attention. We want others to admire and praise us. St. Josemaría Escrivá, canonized by John Paul II two years ago, made use of this scene from the Gospel.

He assured us that he was a

worthless, mangy donkey. But since humility is truth, he also recognized that he was the depositary of many gifts from God, especially that of opening up divine paths on earth, showing millions of men and women that they could be saints in the fulfillment of their professional work and their ordinary duties.

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. We need to draw conclusions from this. Every Christian can and should become a throne for Christ. Here some words of Saint Josemaría are very appropriate: "If Jesus' reign in my soul, in your soul, meant that he should find it a perfect dwelling place, then indeed would we have reason to despair. But Jesus makes do with a poor animal for a throne. . . . There are hundreds of animals more beautiful, more deft and strong. But it was a donkey Christ chose when he presented himself to the people as king in response to their acclamation. For Jesus has no time for calculations, for astuteness, for the cruelty of cold hearts, for attractive but empty beauty. What he likes is the cheerfulness of a young heart, a simple step, a natural voice, clean eyes, attention to his affectionate word of advice. That is how he reigns in the soul."

Let us allow him to take possession of our thoughts, words and deeds. Above all, let us free ourselves of self-love, the greatest obstacle to Christ's reign. Let us be humble, without assuming merits that don't belong to us. Imagine how ridiculous it would have been for the donkey to appropriate to himself the acclaim and applause that the people were directing to the Master!

Commenting on this Gospel scene, John Paul II recalls, "Jesus didn't see his earthly existence as a search for power, as a means to worldly success and a career, seeking to dominate others. On the contrary, he gave up the privileges of his equality with God, and took the form of a servant, becoming like us men. And he was obedient to the Father's plan, even unto death on the cross" (Homily, April 8, 2001).

The enthusiasm of the crowd usually doesn't last. A few days later, those who had received him with acclaim, were crying out for his death. And we, do we let ourselves be carried along by a momentary enthusiasm? If during these days we sense God's grace passing close to us, let us make room for it in our souls. Rather than palms or olive branches, let us spread our hearts on the ground. Let us be humble, mortified, understanding towards others. This is the homage that Jesus expects from us.

Holy Week offers us an occasion to relive the most important moments of our redemption. But let us not forget that, as Saint Josemaría wrote, "If we are to accompany Christ in his glory at the end of Holy Week, we must first enter into his holocaust and be truly united to him, as he lies dead on Calvary." To attain this, there is no better path than walking hand in hand with Mary. May our Lady obtain the grace we need so that these days will leave a deep imprint on our souls. Let this week be, for each of us, an opportunity to grow in God's love, so we may make that Love known to many others.

MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK
APRIL 5, 2004

Yesterday we recalled Christ's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. A great crowd of his disciples and other persons acclaimed him as the Messiah and King of Israel. At the end of the day, exhausted, he returned to Bethany, a village close to the capital, where he was accustomed to stay on his visits to Jerusalem.

A family of friends living there always had a place for him and his companions. Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, is the head of the family. With him live his sisters Martha and Mary, who fondly await the Master's arrival, happy to be able to serve him.

In the last days of his life on earth, Jesus spent long hours in Jerusalem preaching intensely. In the evening, he recovered his strength in the home of his friends. And in Bethany there took place an episode described in the Gospel of today's Mass.

"Six days before the Passover," St. John tells us, "Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment."

We immediately see the generosity of this woman. She wanted to show her gratitude to the Master for

having restored her brother to life, and for so many other gifts they had received. And she spared no expense. Judas, present at the supper, carefully calculated the price of the perfume. Instead of praising Mary's refinement, he voiced a criticism: "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" In reality, as St. John notes, he was not concerned about the poor. His interest was in handling the money of the common purse, and stealing from it.

"But Jesus' own reaction is completely different," writes John Paul II. "While in no way detracting from the duty of charity towards the needy, for whom the disciples must always show special care—the poor you will always have with you' (*Mt* 26, 11; *Mk* 14:7; cf. *Jn* 12:8)—he looks towards his imminent death and burial, and sees this act of anointing as an anticipation of the honor which his body will continue to merit even after his death, indissolubly bound as it is to the mystery of his person" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 47).

To be a true virtue, charity has to be ordered. And God holds first place: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like unto it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the prophets. Therefore, it is a mistake to overlook the needs of the Church

and her sacred ministers, using as an excuse the desire to alleviate the material needs of men. As Saint Josemaría writes:

“That woman in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, who anoints the Master’s head with precious ointment, reminds us of our duty to be generous in the worship of God.

“All beauty, richness and majesty seem little to me. —And against those who attack the richness of sacred vessels, of vestments and altars, stands the praise given by Jesus: *‘opus enim bonum operata est in me’*—she has acted well towards me.”

How many people act like Judas. They see the good that others are doing, but they don’t want to acknowledge it. They try to find twisted intentions, to criticize, to gossip, to make rash judgments. They reduce charity to the purely material—giving a few coins to the needy, perhaps to quiet their conscience—forgetting that, as Saint Josemaría also wrote, “Christian charity cannot be limited to giving things or money to the needy. It seeks, above all, to respect and understand each person for what he is, in his intrinsic dignity as a man and child of God.”

The Virgin Mary dedicated herself completely to our Lord, and was always concerned about the needs of those around her. Today we ask her to intercede for us, so that, in our own lives, love for God and love for neighbor will merge into a single reality, like the two sides of a coin.

TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK
APRIL 6, 2004

The Gospel of today’s Mass ends with the announcement that the apostles will desert Jesus during the Passion. When Simon Peter, filled with presumption, tells him, “I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times.”

Within a few days the prediction was fulfilled. Nevertheless, a few hours earlier, the Master had given them a clear lesson, as if preparing them for the approaching moments of darkness.

This was on the day after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus and the apostles hurriedly left Bethany very early in the morning, perhaps without bringing any food. And, as St. Mark tells us, “our Lord was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, ‘May no one ever eat fruit from you again.’ And his disciples heard it.”

In the evening they returned to the village. It must have been late and they didn’t notice the cursed fig tree. But the following day, Tuesday, as they were returning to Jerusalem, they all saw the tree, which before had been so leafy, now with its branches bare and dried up. Peter called Jesus’ attention to it: “Master, look! The fig tree which you cursed

has withered.” And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.”

During his public life, to perform miracles, Jesus asked for only one thing: faith. To the two blind men who asked him to cure them, he said: “Do you believe that I can do this?” ‘Yes, Lord,’ they answered. Then he touched their eyes saying: ‘Let it be done to you according to your faith.’ And their eyes were opened.” The Gospels tell us that in many places he could hardly perform any miracles, because the people lacked faith.

We also must ask ourselves: How goes our faith? Do we truly believe in the word of God? Do we ask for what we need in prayer, sure that we will obtain it if it is for our good? Do we insist in our petitions as much as necessary, without discouragement?

Saint Josemaria comments on this scene from the Gospel. “Jesus approaches the fig tree. He approaches you, he approaches me. Jesus hungers, he thirsts for souls. On the Cross he cried out, *Sitio!* I thirst (*Jn* 19:28). He thirsts for us, for our love, for our souls, and for all the souls we must bring to him, along the way of the Cross, which is the way to immortality and heavenly glory.”

He approaches the fig tree, finding nothing but leaves (*Mt* 21:19). What a shame. Does the same thing happen in our lives? Do we lack

faith, and a vibrant humility; do we offer neither sacrifices nor deeds? The disciples marveled at the miracle, but they fail to draw profit from it. A few days later they denied their Master. Faith has to inform our whole life. “Christ lays down one condition,” Saint Josemaria continues, “we must live by faith; then we will be able to move mountains. And so many things need moving... in the world, but, first of all, in our own hearts. So many obstacles placed in the way of grace! We have to have faith, therefore: faith and deeds, faith and sacrifice, faith and humility.”

Mary, through her faith, made possible the work of redemption. John Paul II notes that “at the center of this mystery, in the midst of this wonderment of faith, stands Mary...the loving Mother of the Redeemer” (*Redemptoris Mater*, 51). Mary constantly accompanies all men and women along the paths that lead to eternal life. The Church, writes the Pope, “sees Mary deeply rooted in humanity’s history, in man’s eternal vocation according to the providential plan which God has made for him from eternity. She sees Mary maternally present and sharing in the many complicated problems which today beset the lives of individuals, families and nations; she sees her helping the Christian people in the constant struggle between good and evil, to ensure that it ‘does not fall,’ or, if it has fallen, that it ‘rises again’” (*Redemptoris Mater*, 52).

Mary, our Mother: win for us, by your powerful intercession, a sincere faith, a sure hope, a burning love.

*WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK
APRIL 7, 2004*

Wednesday of Holy Week recalls the sad story of one who was an apostle of Christ, Judas. As St. Matthew tells us in his gospel: "Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him."

Why does the Church recall this event? So that we realize that we all might behave as Judas did. So that we ask our Lord that, on our part, there be no treachery, nor distancing, nor abandonment. Not only because of the great harm this could bring to our personal lives, but because we could drag along others who need the help of our good example, of our support, of our friendship.

In some places in Latin America, the images of Christ crucified show a deep bruise on our Lord's left cheek. People say this represents Judas' kiss. So great is the pain that our sins cause Jesus. Let us tell him that we want to be faithful, that we don't want to sell him, as Judas did, for thirty coins, for a trifle, for that's what our sins are: pride, envy, impurity, hatred, resentment... When a temptation threatens to overwhelm us, let's remember that it is not worthwhile to exchange the happiness of God's children, which is what we are, for a pleasure that ends right away, leaving the bitter aftertaste of defeat and infidelity.

We have to feel on our shoulders the weight of the Church and of all humanity. Isn't it marvelous to know that each of us can influence the whole world. In that place where we are, doing our work well, caring for our family, serving our friends, we can help make so many people happy. As Saint Josemaria wrote, through the fulfillment of our duties, we Christians have to be "like the stone fallen into the lake. With your word and your example you produce a first circle... and it another... and another, and another..." Until you reach the furthest places.

Let us ask our Lord that there be no more betrayals; that we learn, with his grace, how to reject the temptations that the devil presents us with, trying to trick us. We have to say *no*, firmly, to all that would separate us from God. Thus the sad story of Judas will not be repeated in our own lives.

And if we feel ourselves weak, let us hurry to the holy Sacrament of Penance! There our Lord is waiting, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, to give us an embrace and offer us his friendship. He is continually going forth to meet us, even if we have fallen low, very low. It's always time to return to God! We should never react with discouragement or pessimism. Don't think: What can I do, if I'm just a pile of wretchedness? God's mercy is even greater. What can I do, if I fall again and again through my weakness? God's power to lift us from our falls is even greater.

The sins of Judas and of Peter were great. Both of them betrayed

the Master: one by handing him over to his persecutors, the other by denying him three times. And nevertheless, how differently each reacted. Our Lord longed to show mercy towards both. Peter repented; he wept over his sin, he asked for forgiveness, and Christ strengthened him in his faith and love. In time, he came to give his life for our Lord. But Judas failed to trust in Christ's mercy. Up till the last moment, God held the doors of forgiveness open for him, but he didn't want to enter them through penance.

In his first encyclical, John Paul II spoke of Christ's "right to meet each one of us in that key moment in the soul's life constituted by the moment of conversion and forgiveness" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 20). Let's not deprive Jesus of that right! Let's not take away from God the Father the joy of giving us a welcoming embrace! Let's not sadden the Holy Spirit, who wants to give supernatural life back to souls!

Let's ask Blessed Mary, the Hope of Christians, to prevent us from becoming discouraged on seeing our mistakes and sins, perhaps repeated ones. May she win for us from her Son the grace of conversion, an efficacious desire to go humbly and contritely to Confession, the sacrament of divine mercy, beginning and beginning again as often as necessary.

HOLY THURSDAY
APRIL 8, 2004

The Holy Thursday liturgy is very rich in content. It is the great day when the Holy Eucharist was

instituted, a gift of heaven for mankind. It is also the day of the institution of the priesthood, a new divine gift that assures the real and effective presence of the Sacrifice of Calvary in all times and places, enabling us to receive its fruits.

The moment when Jesus was to offer his life for mankind was approaching. So great was his love that, in his infinite wisdom, he found a way of going and remaining at the same time. Saint Josemaría, reflecting on people who are obliged to leave their home and family to earn their living elsewhere, notes that human love makes use of a symbol. Those who are parting exchange a remembrance, perhaps a photograph. Jesus, perfect God and perfect man, does not leave a symbol, but the reality. He himself remains. He goes to the Father, but he remains with us men. He is there, under the species of bread and wine, really present, with his Body, his Blood, his Soul and his Divinity.

How do we correspond to his immense love? By attending Holy Mass, the living and true memorial of the Sacrifice of Calvary, with faith and devotion. By preparing ourselves very well to receive Communion, with our soul well cleansed. By frequently visiting Jesus hidden in the tabernacle.

The first reading from today's Mass recalls what God stipulated for the people of Israel, so they would not forget the gifts they had received. It goes into great detail, from how the paschal lamb should be prepared, to small observances to help recall

the passage of the Lord. If this was prescribed to commemorate events that were only an image of the liberation from sin worked by Jesus, how should we behave now, when we have truly been rescued from the slavery of sin and made children of God.

This is why the Church insists on great care in all that refers to the Eucharist. Do we take part in the Holy Sacrifice every Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation with the realization that we are participating in a divine action?

St. John relates that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples before the Last Supper. One has to be clean in soul and body to receive Him worthily. That is why He left us the sacrament of Penance.

We also commemorate the institution of the priesthood. Let us ask, with full sincerity, what St. Josemaría Escrivá used to pray: "Lord, put into my heart the love with which you want me to love you."

In today's scene, our Lady is not physically present, although she was in Jerusalem during those days. We will find her tomorrow at the foot of the Cross. But today, with her discreet and silent presence, she accompanies her Son very closely, in a deep union of prayer, sacrifice and dedication. John Paul II writes that, after our Lord's ascension into heaven, she took part intensely in the Eucharistic celebration of the early Christians: "The body given up for us and made present under sacramental signs was the same body which she had conceived in her womb! For Mary, receiv-

ing the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 56).

Now as well Mary keeps Jesus company in all the world's tabernacles. We ask her to teach us to be Eucharistic souls, men and women of sure faith and upright piety, who strive never to leave Jesus alone. May we learn how to adore him, to ask for his forgiveness, to thank him for his gifts, to keep him company.

*GOOD FRIDAY
APRIL 9, 2004*

Today we want to accompany Jesus on the Cross. I recall some word of Saint Josemaría Escrivá on a Good Friday. He invited us to relive personally the hours of the Passion: from Christ's agony in the Garden of Olives to the scourging, the crowning with thorns and his death on the Cross. He said: "With the omnipotence of God bound by the hand of man, they lead my Jesus from place to place, among the insults and the shoves of the crowd."

Each of us has to see himself in the midst of that crowd, because it was our sins that caused the immense pain that crushed our Lord's soul and body. Yes, each of us pushes Jesus, made into an object of ridicule, from one place to another. It is we who, with our sins, cry out loudly for his death. And he, perfect God and perfect man, lets it be done. The prophet Isaiah had foretold it all: "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his

mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb.”

It is only right that we feel the responsibility for our sins. It is logical that we are deeply grateful to Jesus. It is natural that we seek reparation, because of our failures to love. He himself always responds with a total love. During these days of Holy Week, we see our Lord as though closer to us, more like us, who are his brothers and sisters. Let us meditate on some words of John Paul II: “Those who believe in Jesus, crucified and risen, carry the Cross in triumph as an indisputable proof that God is love...However, faith in Christ can never be taken for granted...The Easter Mystery that we will relive during the days of Holy Week is always present” (Homily, March 24, 2002).

Let us ask Jesus, during this Holy Week, to awaken in our soul the awareness of being men and women who are truly Christian, because we live facing God, and, with God, facing all people.

We can't let our Lord carry the Cross alone. Let us accept joyfully little daily sacrifices.

Let us take advantage of the ability to love that God has given us, in order to make specific resolutions, and not be satisfied with mere feelings. Let us say sincerely: Lord, never again, never again! Let us ask with faith that we and everyone on earth will learn to hate moral sin and to abhor deliberate venial sin, which has caused our God so much suffering.

How great is the power of the Cross. When Christ is the object of everyone's derision and ridicule. When He is on the wood without wanting to escape from those nails. When no one would give a cent for his life, the good thief—a man like us—discovers the love of the agonizing Christ, and asks for forgiveness. “Today you shall be with me in paradise.” What power there is in suffering, when it is accepted in union with our Lord. It is capable of drawing glory and life from the saddest situation. That one who addressed the agonizing Christ found remission for his sins, eternal happiness.

We must do the same. If we lose our fear of the Cross, if we unite ourselves to Christ on the Cross, we will receive his grace, his power, his effectiveness. And we will be filled with peace.

At the foot of the Cross we find Mary, the most faithful Virgin. Let us ask her, on this Good Friday, to give us her love and her strength, so that we too will learn how to accompany Jesus. We go to her with words of Saint Josemaría Escrivá that have helped millions of people. Say to her: “Mother, my Mother—yours, because you are hers on many counts—may your love bind me to your Son's Cross: may I not lack the faith, nor the courage, nor the daring, to carry out the will of our Jesus.”

HOLY SATURDAY
APRIL 10, 2004

Today is a day of silence in the Church. Christ lies in the sepulcher while the Church meditates, mar-

veling at what this Lord of ours has done for us. She observes silence in order to learn from the Master, contemplating his bruised and battered body.

Each of us can and should unite ourselves to the Church's silence. And on realizing that we are responsible for his death, we will strive to bring it about that our passions, our rebelliousness, everything that separates us from God, also keep silent. But not by merely being passive: it is a grace that God grants us when we ask for it before the dead body of his Son, when we make an effort to uproot from our life everything that distances us from him.

Holy Saturday is not a sad day. Our Lord has conquered the devil and sin, and within a few hours He will also conquer death with his glorious resurrection. He has reconciled us with his heavenly Father: now we are God's children! Let us resolve to be grateful, certain that we will overcome all obstacles, of whatever form, if we stay closely united to Jesus through prayer and the sacraments.

The earth has a hunger for God, although often it doesn't realize it. People want us to speak to them about this joyful reality, about getting to know our Lord. That is the mission of us Christians. Let us have the courage of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who during Christ's life paid deference to human respects, but who at the definitive moment dared to ask Pilate for Jesus' dead body, in order to bury it. Or the courage of the holy women who, when Jesus is already a cadaver, buy fragrances to anoint his body, with-

out fearing the soldiers who guard the sepulcher.

At the moment when everyone flees, when all feel the right to insult, ridicule and jeer at Jesus, they go and demand: give us the Body, it belongs to us. We ask for forgiveness and we say, in words of Saint Josemaria: "With them I too will go up to the foot of the Cross; I will press my arms tightly round the cold Body, the corpse of Christ, with the fire of my love; I will unnailed it, with my reparation and mortifications; I will wrap it in the new winding-sheet of my clean life, and I will bury it in the living rock of my breast, where no one can tear it away from me. And there, Lord, take your rest!"

We understand why they place the dead body of her Son in the arms of his Mother, before burying him. Mary was the only creature who could tell him that she understood perfectly his love for mankind, because she didn't cause his suffering. The most pure Virgin speaks for us; but she speaks so that we react, so that we experience her suffering, made one and the same with the suffering of Christ.

We draw out resolutions of conversion and apostolate, determined to identify ourselves more closely with Christ, to be more fully concerned about souls. Let us ask our Lord to transmit to us the saving efficacy of his passion and death. The people around us are waiting for us Christians to reveal to them the marvel of finding God. This Holy Week, and afterwards every day, has to be a leap of quality for us, asking our Lord to completely fill our lives.

We have to communicate to many people the new life that Jesus gained for us by the Redemption.

Let us go to holy Mary: Lady of Solitude, Mother of God and our Mother, help us understand, as St. Josemaria wrote, that “we must bring into our life, to make them our own, the life and death of Christ. We must die through mortification and penance, so that Christ may live in us through Love. And then follow in the footsteps of Christ, with a zeal to co redeem all mankind. We must give our life for others. That is the only way to live the life of Jesus Christ and to become one and the same thing with him.”

EASTER SUNDAY
APRIL 11, 2004

“And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. “This is how St. Mark begins his narration of what happened that morning, two thousand years ago on the first Christian Easter.

Jesus had been buried. To the eyes of men, his life and message had ended in the most abject failure. His disciples, confused and frightened, had scattered. Even the women coming to anoint him piously, asked one another: “Who will roll away the stone for us, from the door of the tomb?” “Nevertheless,” Saint Josemaria points out, “they continue on. You and I, how much do we vacillate? Do we have the same holy determi-

nation, or do we have to confess that we feel ashamed as we contemplate the decisiveness, the courage, the daring of those women?” Fulfilling God’s will, being faithful to Christ’s law, living our faith consistently, can at times seem quite difficult. Obstacles present themselves that seem insuperable. Nevertheless, God always conquers.

The epic of Jesus of Nazareth did not end with his ignominious death on the Cross. The last word is that of his glorious resurrection. And Christians, in Baptism, have died and been resurrected with Christ: dead to sin and alive towards God. “O Christ,” we say with our Holy Father John Paul II, “how can we fail to thank you for the ineffable gift which, on this night, you lavish upon us? The mystery of your death and resurrection descends into the baptismal water that receive the old, carnal man, and makes him clean with divine youthfulness itself” (Homily, April 15, 2001).

Today the Church, filled with joy, exclaims: “This is the day that the Lord has made: Let us rejoice and be glad in it!” This cry of jubilation is prolonged for fifty days throughout Easter time, echoing of the words of St. Paul: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

It is logical to think—and this is what the Church’s tradition holds—that Jesus, when he rose, first appeared to his Blessed Mother. The

fact that she does not appear in the Gospel narratives, with the other women, is, as John Paul II points out, an indication that our Lady had already met with Jesus. "This deduction is also confirmed," the Pope adds, "by the fact that the first witnesses of the resurrection were, by Christ's will, the women who had remained faithful at the foot of the Cross, and who therefore were firmer in their faith" (Audience, May 21, 1997). Only Mary had kept her faith fully intact during the bitter hours of the Passion; therefore it seems only natural that our Lord would appear first to her.

We have to always stay close to our Lady, even more at Easter time, and learn from her. With what eagerness she had awaited the Resurrection! Mary knew that Jesus had come to save the world and that, therefore, he had to suffer and die; but she also knew that he could not remain subject to death, because he is Life.

A good way to live the time of Easter is to strive to help others share in Christ's life, fulfilling with great diligence the new commandment of charity that our Lord gave us on the eve of his passion: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The risen Christ now repeats this to each of us. He tells us: truly love one another; strive every day to serve the others; be concerned about the slightest details to make life agreeable to those who live with you.

But let us return to the scene of Jesus as He appears to his Blessed Mother. How happy must our Lady have been to contemplate that most

Holy Humanity—flesh of her flesh and life of her life—now fully glorified! Let us ask her to teach us to sacrifice ourselves for the others without being noticed, without even looking for thanks. May we have a hunger to pass unnoticed, so as to possess God's life and communicate it to others. Today let us address the Queen of Heaven with the greeting proper to the Easter season. *Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia. / For he whom you did merit to bear, alleluia. / Has risen as he said, alleluia. / Rejoice and be glad O Virgin Mary, Alleluia. / For the Lord is truly risen, alleluia.*

Rome April 5, 2004

Interview by the Zenit News Agency

1. *In your statement regarding March 11, you invited people to pray for the terrorists. Is it possible to pray for people who are capable of such savage acts?*

All we need to do is look at Jesus Christ, our model at all times. His example leads us to say, *yes*, it is possible to pray when one knows how to distinguish between the crime and its perpetrator. When we pray for those who kill so savagely, we don't deny the evil of their deeds or the need to bring them to judgment before the law. There is no justification for evil. Violence is indefensible. But intransigence with evil is surely compatible with something that goes to the heart of the Church's mission--pardoning sinners. Justice is not in conflict with mercy.