CHRIST’S GENTLE INVITATION

Our Gospel today contains some of Jesus’ best known and most comforting words. After speaking tenderly of his intimate relationship with his Father, Jesus invites us to come to him, embrace his yoke, and learn from him. Accepting this invitation brings great peace and consolation. Indeed, these are truly comforting and assuring words for all of us—in the midst of our daily labors and heavy burdens.

This same Gospel passage, coincidentally, served as this year’s theme for Pope Francis’ message as the worldwide Church celebrated the “World Day of the Sick” in 2020. This annual observance is held every February 11, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. It was Saint John Paul II who instituted this special event in 1992 and appropriately linked it with Lourdes, the Marian Sanctuary in France where many pilgrims and the sick seek healing. The day has three themes: (a) it reminds the entire Church to pray for those who are sick; (b) it invites all Christians to reflect upon and respond to human suffering and pain; (c) it expresses appreciation for all those who work in healthcare and seek to alleviate all forms of suffering.

Pope Francis Speaks. The words of Pope Francis can serve as a source of enlightenment and comfort for all of us, as we struggle with both the small and big challenges of daily life. He asserts that Jesus’ words can give “new strength to those who are weary and tired,” to those who “suffer in body and soul.” “Jesus urges everyone to draw near to him—Come to me—and he promises them comfort and repose.” Jesus invites everyone “to share in his life and to experience his tender love.”

The Pope continues: “Why does Jesus have these feelings? Because he himself became frail, endured human suffering and received comfort from his Father. Indeed, only those who personally experience suffering are then able to comfort others.” Francis emphasizes that a “personalized approach” is always needed in assisting others who are in need; this means that our efforts must be “not just of curing but also of caring.” In short, all efforts to assist the poor, the needy, the sick, and the suffering must be done with personal love, care, and attention. In this way, we become reflections of the “eyes and heart of Jesus.”

Church: A Caring Home. Pope Francis asserts that “the Church desires to become more and more the ‘inn’ of the Good Samaritan who is Christ (cf. Lk 10:34), that is, a home where you can encounter his grace, which finds expression in closeness, acceptance and relief. In this home you can meet people, who, healed in their frailty by God’s mercy, will help you bear your cross and enable your suffering to give you a new perspective.”

We are to come to Jesus and to his Church, where we can encounter God’s tender love and care. It is the task of all Christians to serve the needs of others, especially the poor, thus “reflecting the image of Christ, the Good Samaritan, by their acts of tender love and closeness.”

Turning to Mary. In concluding his message, Francis writes: “To the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, I entrust all those who bear the burden of illness, along with their families...” We ask our tender and merciful God and his Mother to keep us in the embrace of divine love, to alleviate suffering, and to give us the desire and strength to render compassionate service to others.

— Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM

PASTORAL CATECHESIS FOR THE YEAR OF ECUMENISM, INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Walking the Dialogue Road
Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM

The Second Vatican Council and recent Popes have affirmed that interreligious dialogue is integral to a comprehensive understanding of the Church’s mission in the contemporary world. Seeking to translate this perspective into daily life, today we explore two more imperatives of the “Decalogue of Interfaith Dialogue.”

RULE SEVEN: Authentic dialogue only takes place between equals. Both partners, though members of different faith traditions, come mainly to learn from each other; thus, the dialogue is (and must be): “equal with equal.” Therefore, if it be, for example, that the Christian views Hinduism as inferior, or if the Hindu views Christianity as inferior, there will be no dialogue. Dialogue recognizes the authenticity of the other person’s religious faith.

RULE EIGHT: Dialogue takes place only on the basis of mutual trust. Hence, it is wise not to tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning, but rather to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground, helping to thereby establish human trust. One thinks immediately about how the practices of prayer, fasting, meditation, and service of the needy poor have common perspectives across various religions. Points of religious teaching or doctrine can be discussed only at a much later time.
THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Antiphon
(Cf. Ps 48[47]:10-11)
(Recited when there is no opening song.)

Your merciful love, O God, we have received in the midst of your temple. Your praise, O God, like your name, reaches the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with saving justice.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here.)

P — The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(These [or similar words] may be used to address the assembly.)

P — Today’s Gospel challenges us to make a firm commitment to the Lord. The cost of following Jesus is high: Jesus claims priority over the most important things in our lives, including family and self. Yet by dying to self and losing everything else for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel, we will surely find life. As Paul puts it, “If we have died with Christ, we shall also live with him.”

Penitential Rite

P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)
P — You were sent to heal the contrite of heart: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.
P — You came to call sinners: Christ, have mercy.
All — Christ, have mercy.
P — You are seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.
P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

Gloria
All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

O God, who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world, fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading
(Zec 9:9-10) (Sit)

Zechariah pictures the Prince of Peace as a humble king who enters Jerusalem. This oracle is fulfilled in Jesus who enters Jerusalem in triumph, riding on an ass.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Zechariah

THUS SAYS the LORD: Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass.

Second Reading
(Rom 8:9, 11-13)

Jesus frees us from the burden of sin and gives the liberating Spirit who dwells in our hearts and stirs us to a new life of grace.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

BROTHERS AND SISTERS:
You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to
Homily (Sit)

Profession of Faith (Stand)

All — I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

(At the words that follow up to and including and became man, all bow.)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

P — Jesus reveals to us that God is gentle and compassionate, slow to anger and of great kindness. This prompts us to approach the Father with trust as we pray:

R — Father, listen to the prayers of your children.

C — May the Church, under Pope Francis’ leadership, stand up to the cause of peace, justice, and love—especially in places where war, oppression, and the culture of death continue to reign. We pray: (R)

C — May our bishops, priests, and deacons prove to be worthy ministers by their simplicity of life and their words of solace and encouragement. We pray: (R)

C — May the leaders of nations and all government officials work for peace and justice and attend to the welfare of the poor and the homeless. We pray: (R)

C — May those who are oppressed by dehumanizing systems, elderly people weighed down by loneliness, and families separated by quarrels and financial problems find consolation in you. We pray: (R)

C — May the Lord give healing hope and comfort to those who are sick and abandoned by their family and may eternal rest be given to those who have died today. We pray: (R)

C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause). We pray: (R)

P — Heavenly Father, hear our supplications. Do not allow us to be overwhelmed by confusion, doubt, and discord, but fill us with faith and courage in Jesus, your Son and our Lord.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All — Amen.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation of the Gifts

(Stand)

P — Pray, brethren...

All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P — May this oblation dedicated to your name purify us, O
Lord, and day by day bring our conduct closer to the life of heaven.
Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

Preface II: The mystery of salvation

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.
P — Lift up your hearts.
All — We lift them up to the Lord.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All — It is right and just.
P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For out of compassion for the waywardness that is ours, he humbled himself and was born of the Virgin; by the passion of the Cross he freed us from the unending death, and by rising from the dead he gave us life eternal.

And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:

All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)

All — When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer

All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion (Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon (Mt 11:28)

Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you, says the Lord.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

Grant, we pray, O Lord, that, having been replenished by such great gifts, we may gain the prize of salvation and never cease to praise you.

Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Prayer over the People

P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)

May the God of all consolation order your days in his peace and grant you the gifts of his blessing.
All — Amen.

May he free you always from every distress and confirm your hearts in his love.
All — Amen.

So that on this life’s journey you may be effective in good works, rich in the gifts of hope, faith and charity, and may come happily to eternal life.
All — Amen.

P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (+) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal

P — Go forth, the Mass is ended.
All — Thanks be to God.

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