

Letter to Colossians

Colossians 1

(Col 1, 1-4) The holy ones and faithful brothers in Christ

[1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, [2] to the holy ones and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father. [3] We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, [4] for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the holy ones

(CCC 2030) It is in the Church, in communion with all the baptized, that the Christian fulfills his vocation. From the Church he receives the Word of God containing the teachings of "the law of Christ". From the Church he receives the grace of the sacraments that sustains him on the "way." From the Church he learns the *example of holiness* and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary; he discerns it in the authentic witness of those who live it; he discovers it in the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints who have gone before him and whom the liturgy celebrates in the rhythms of the sanctoral cycle. (CCC 954) *The three states of the Church*. "When the Lord comes in glory, and all his angels with him, death will be no more and all things will be subject to him. But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating 'in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is'" (LG 49; cf. Mt 25:31; 1 Cor 15:26-27; Council of Florence (1439): DS 1305): All of us, however, in varying degrees and in different ways share in the same charity towards God and our neighbors, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God. All, indeed, who are of Christ and who have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together (LG 49; cf. Eph 4:16).

(Col 1, 5-8) The hope reserved for you in heaven

[5] Because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. Of this you have already heard through the word of truth, the gospel, [6] that has come to you. Just as in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, so also among you, from the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth, [7] as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow slave, who is a trustworthy minister of Christ on your behalf [8] and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

(CCC 1817) Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb 10:23). "The Holy Spirit... he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:6-7). (CCC 1818) The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during

times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.

(Col 1, 9-11) To live in a manner worthy of the Lord

[9] Therefore, from the day we heard this, we do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding [10] to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, [11] strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy

(CCC 2520) Baptism confers on its recipient the grace of purification from all sins. But the baptized must continue to struggle against concupiscence of the flesh and disordered desires. With God's grace he will prevail - by the *virtue* and *gift of chastity*, for chastity lets us love with upright and undivided heart; - by *purity of intention* which consists in seeking the true end of man: with simplicity of vision, the baptized person seeks to find and to fulfill God's will in everything (Cf. Rom 12:2; Col 1:10); - by *purity of vision*, external and internal; by discipline of feelings and imagination; by refusing all complicity in impure thoughts that incline us to turn aside from the path of God's commandments: "Appearance arouses yearning in fools" (Wis 15:5); - *by prayer*: I thought that continence arose from one's own powers, which I did not recognize in myself. I was foolish enough not to know... that no one can be continent unless you grant it. For you would surely have granted it if my inner groaning had reached your ears and I with firm faith had cast my cares on you (St. Augustine, *Conf.* 6, 11, 20: PL 32, 729-730).

(Col 1, 12-14) He delivered us from the power of darkness

[12] giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. [13] He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

(CCC 1250) Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called (Cf. Council of Trent (1546): DS 1514; cf. Col 1:12-14). The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth (Cf. CIC, can. 867; CCEO, cann. 681; 686, 1). (CCC 1251) Christian parents will recognize that this practice also accords with their role as nurturers of the life that God has entrusted to them (Cf. LG 11; 41; GS 48; CIC, can. 868). (CCC 517) Christ's whole life is a mystery of *redemption*. Redemption comes to us above all through the blood of his cross (Cf. Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14; 2 Pt 1:18-19), but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life: - already in his Incarnation through which by becoming poor he enriches us with his poverty (Cf. 2 Cor 8:9); - in his hidden life which by his submission atones for our disobedience (Cf. Lk 2:51); - in his word which purifies its hearers (Cf. Jn 15:3); - in his healings and exorcisms by which "he took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Mt 8:17; cf. Isa 53:4); - and in his Resurrection by which he justifies us (Cf. Rom 4:25).

(Col 1, 15) He is the image of the invisible God

[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

(CCC 241) For this reason the apostles confess Jesus to be the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; as "the image of the invisible God"; as the "radiance of the glory of God and the very stamp of his nature" (Jn 1:1; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). (CCC 1701) "Christ,... in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, makes man fully manifest to himself and brings to light his exalted vocation" (GS 22). It is in Christ, "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4), that man has been created "in the image and likeness" of the Creator. It is in Christ, Redeemer and Savior, that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God (Cf. GS 22). (CCC 380) "Father,... you formed man in your own likeness and set him over the whole world to serve you, his creator, and to rule over all creatures" (*Roman Missal*, EP IV, 118).

(Col 1, 16) For in him were created all things

[16] For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him.

(CCC 299) Because God creates through wisdom, his creation is ordered: "You have arranged all things by measure and number and weight" (Wis 11:20). The universe, created in and by the eternal Word, the "image of the invisible God", is destined for and addressed to man, himself created in the "image of God" and called to a personal relationship with God (Col 1:15, Gen 1:26). Our human understanding, which shares in the light of the divine intellect, can understand what God tells us by means of his creation, though not without great effort and only in a spirit of humility and respect before the Creator and his work (Cf. Ps 19:2-5; Job 42:3). Because creation comes forth from God's goodness, it shares in that goodness - "and God saw that it was good... very good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 31) - for God willed creation as a gift addressed to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him. On many occasions the Church has had to defend the goodness of creation, including that of the physical world (Cf. DS 286; 455-463; 800; 1333; 3002). (CCC 331) Christ is the centre of the angelic world. They are *his* angels: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him..." (Mt 25:31) They belong to him because they were created *through* and *for* him: "for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:16). They belong to him still more because he has made them messengers of his saving plan: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" (Heb 1:14).

(Col 1, 17) He is before all things

[17] He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

(CCC 291) "In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God... all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:1-3). The New Testament reveals that God created everything by the eternal Word, his beloved Son. In him "all things were created, in heaven and on earth... all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things,

and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17). The Church's faith likewise confesses the creative action of the Holy Spirit, the "giver of life", "the Creator Spirit" ("*Veni, Creator Spiritus*"), the "source of every good" (Cf. Nicene Creed: DS 150; Hymn "*Veni, Creator Spiritus*"; Byzantine Troparion of Pentecost vespers, "*O heavenly King, Consoler*"). (CCC 504) Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary's womb because he is the New Adam, who inaugurates the new creation: "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven" (1 Cor 15:45, 47). From his conception, Christ's humanity is filled with the Holy Spirit, for God "gives him the Spirit without measure" (Jn 3:34). From "his fullness" as the head of redeemed humanity "we have all received, grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16; cf. Col 1:18).

(Col 1, 18-20) He is the firstborn from the dead

[18] He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him), whether those on earth or those in heaven.

(CCC 753) In Scripture, we find a host of interrelated images and figures through which Revelation speaks of the inexhaustible mystery of the Church. The images taken from the Old Testament are variations on a profound theme: the People of God. In the New Testament, all these images find a new center because Christ has become the head of this people, which henceforth is his Body (Cf. Eph 1:22; Col 1:18; LG 9). Around this center are grouped images taken "from the life of the shepherd or from cultivation of the land, from the art of building or from family life and marriage" (LG 6). (CCC 792) Christ "is the head of the body, the Church" (Col 1:18). He is the principle of creation and redemption. Raised to the Father's glory, "in everything he [is] preeminent" (Col 1:18), especially in the Church, through whom he extends his reign over all things. (CCC 658) Christ, "the first-born from the dead" (Col 1:18), is the principle of our own resurrection, even now by the justification of our souls (cf. Rom 6:4), and one day by the new life he will impart to our bodies (cf. Rom 8:11). (CCC 624) "By the grace of God" Jesus tasted death "for every one" (Heb 2:9). In his plan of salvation, God ordained that his Son should not only "die for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3) but should also "taste death", experience the condition of death, the separation of his soul from his body, between the time he expired on the cross and the time he was raised from the dead. The state of the dead Christ is the mystery of the tomb and the descent into hell. It is the mystery of Holy Saturday, when Christ, lying in the tomb (Cf. Jn 19:42), reveals God's great sabbath rest (Cf. Heb 4:7-9) after the fulfilment (Cf. Jn 19:30) of man's salvation, which brings peace to the whole universe (Cf. Col 1: 18-20).

(Col 1, 21-23) Persevere in the faith, firmly grounded

[21] And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds [22] he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through his death, to present you holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before him, [23] provided that you persevere in the faith, firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, am a minister.

(CCC 1435) Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right (Cf. Am 5:24; Isa 1:17), by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance (Cf. Lk 9:23). (CCC 2305) Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the *peace of Christ*, the messianic "Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:5). By the blood of his Cross, "in his own person he killed the hostility" (Eph 2:16 J.B.; cf. Col 1:20-22), he reconciled men with God and made his Church the sacrament of the unity of the human race and of its union with God. "He is our peace" (Eph 2:14). He has declared: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9). (CCC 162) Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: "Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim 1:18-19). To live, grow and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith (Cf. Mk 9:24; Lk 17:5; 22:32); it must be "working through charity," abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church (Gal 5:6; Rom 15:13; cf. Jas 2:14-26).

(Col 1, 24-25) I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake

[24] Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church, [25] of which I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God,

(CCC 1508) The Holy Spirit gives to some a special charism of healing (Cf. 1 Cor 12:9, 28, 30) so as to make manifest the power of the grace of the risen Lord. But even the most intense prayers do not always obtain the healing of all illnesses. Thus St. Paul must learn from the Lord that "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," and that the sufferings to be endured can mean that "in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church" (2 Cor 12:9; Col 1:24). (CCC 618) The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim 2:5). But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men (GS 22 § 5; cf. § 2). He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him]" (Mt 16:24), for "Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps" (1 Pt 2:21). In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries (Cf. Mk 10:39; Jn 21:18-19; Col 1:24). This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering (Cf. Lk 2:35). Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven (St. Rose of Lima: cf. P. Hansen, *Vita mirabilis* (Louvain, 1668).

(Col 1, 26-29) It is Christ in you, the hope for glory

[26] the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones, [27] to whom God chose to

make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory. [28] It is he whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. [29] For this I labor and struggle, in accord with the exercise of his power working within me.

(CCC 772) It is in the Church that Christ fulfills and reveals his own mystery as the purpose of God's plan: "to unite all things in him" (Eph 1:10). St. Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church "a great mystery." Because she is united to Christ as to her bridegroom, she becomes a mystery in her turn (Eph 5:32; 3:9-11; 5:25-27). Contemplating this mystery in her, Paul exclaims: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27). (CCC 307) To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence by entrusting them with the responsibility of "subduing" the earth and having dominion over it (Cf. Gen 1:26-28). God thus enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation, to perfect its harmony for their own good and that of their neighbors. Though often unconscious collaborators with God's will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers and their sufferings (Cf. Col 1:24). They then fully become "God's fellow workers" and co-workers for his kingdom (1 Cor 3:9; I Thess 3:2; Col 4:11). (CCC 568) Christ's Transfiguration aims at strengthening the apostles' faith in anticipation of his Passion: the ascent on to the "high mountain" prepares for the ascent to Calvary. Christ, Head of the Church, manifests what his Body contains and radiates in the sacraments: "the hope of glory" (Col 1:27; cf. St. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 51, 3; PL 54, 310c).

Colossians 2

(Col 2, 1) How great a struggle I am having for you

[1] For I want you to know how great a struggle I am having for you and for those in Laodicea and all who have not seen me face to face,

(CCC 409) This dramatic situation of "the whole world [which] is in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19; cf. 1 Pt 5:8) makes man's life a battle: The whole of man's history has been the story of dour combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battlefield man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God's grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity (GS 37 § 2). (CCC 2573) God renews his promise to Jacob, the ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel (Cf. Gen 28:10-22). Before confronting his elder brother Esau, Jacob wrestles all night with a mysterious figure who refuses to reveal his name, but he blesses him before leaving him at dawn. From this account, the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance (Cf. Gen 32:24-30; Lk 18:1-8).

(Col 2, 2-3) The knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ

[2] that their hearts may be encouraged as they are brought together in love, to have all the richness of fully assured understanding, for the knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

(CCC 427) In catechesis "Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God,... is taught - everything else is taught with reference to him - and it is Christ alone who teaches - anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ's spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with his lips.... Every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me'" (CT 6; cf. Jn 7:16). (CCC 428) Whoever is called "to teach Christ" must first seek "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus"; he must suffer "the loss of all things... " in order to "gain Christ and be found in him", and "to know him and the power of his resurrection, and [to] share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible [he] may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:8-11). (CCC 429) From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to "evangelize", and to lead others to the "yes" of faith in Jesus Christ. But at the same time the need to know this faith better makes itself felt. To this end, following the order of the Creed, Jesus' principal titles - "Christ", "Son of God", and "Lord" (article 2) - will be presented. The Creed next confesses the chief mysteries of his life - those of his Incarnation (article 3), Paschal mystery (articles 4 and 5) and glorification (articles 6 and 7).

(Col 2, 4-5) No one may deceive you

[4] I say this so that no one may deceive you by specious arguments. [5] For even if I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing as I observe your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

(CCC 469) The Church thus confesses that Jesus is inseparably true God and true man. He is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother: "What he was, he remained and what he was not, he assumed", sings the Roman Liturgy (LH, 1 January, antiphon for Morning Prayer; cf. St. Leo the Great, *Sermo in nat. Dom.* 1, 2; PL 54, 191-192) and the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom proclaims and sings: "O only-begotten Son and Word of God, immortal being, you who deigned for our salvation to become incarnate of the holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary, you who without change became man and were crucified, O Christ our God, you who by your death have crushed death, you who are one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us!" (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Troparion "*O monogenes*"). (CCC 470) Because "human nature was assumed, not absorbed" (GS 22 § 2), in the mysterious union of the Incarnation, the Church was led over the course of centuries to confess the full reality of Christ's human soul, with its operations of intellect and will, and of his human body. In parallel fashion, she had to recall on each occasion that Christ's human nature belongs, as his own, to the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it. Everything that Christ is and does in this nature derives from "one of the Trinity". The Son of God therefore communicates to his humanity his own personal mode of existence in the Trinity. In his soul as in his body, Christ thus expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity (Cf. Jn 14:9-10): The Son of God ... worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin (GS 22 § 2). (CCC 471) Apollinarius of Laodicea asserted that in Christ the divine Word had replaced the soul or spirit. Against this error the Church confessed that the eternal Son also assumed a rational, human soul (Cf. Damasus 1: DS 149).

(Col 2, 6-8) You received Christ Jesus the Lord walk in him

[6] So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, [7] rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. [8] See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.

(CCC 1794) A good and pure conscience is enlightened by true faith, for charity proceeds at the same time "from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith" (1 Tim 5; cf. 3:9; 2 Tim 3; 1 Pet 3:21; Acts 24:16). The more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by objective standards of moral conduct (GS 16). (CCC 1792) Ignorance of Christ and his Gospel, bad example given by others, enslavement to one's passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching, lack of conversion and of charity: these can be at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct.

(Col 2, 9-10) In him dwells the whole fullness of the deity

[9] For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, [10] and you share in this fullness in him, who is the head of every principality and power.

(CCC 463) Belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 Jn 4:2). Such is the joyous conviction of the Church from her beginning whenever she sings "the mystery of our religion": "He was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16). (CCC 464) The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. During the first centuries, the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith against the heresies that falsified it. (CCC 479) At the time appointed by God, the only Son of the Father, the eternal Word, that is, the Word and substantial Image of the Father, became incarnate; without losing his divine nature he has assumed human nature. (CCC 480) Jesus Christ is true God and true man, in the unity of his divine person; for this reason he is the one and only mediator between God and men. (CCC 481) Jesus Christ possesses two natures, one divine and the other human, not confused, but united in the one person of God's Son. (CCC 482) Christ, being true God and true man, has a human intellect and will, perfectly attuned and subject to his divine intellect and divine will, which he has in common with the Father and the Holy Spirit. (CCC 483) The Incarnation is therefore the mystery of the wonderful union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Word.

(Col 2, 11) In him you were also circumcised

[11] In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by hand, by stripping off the carnal body, with the circumcision of Christ.

(CCC 527) Jesus' *circumcision*, on the eighth day after his birth (Cf. Lk 2:21), is the sign of his incorporation into Abraham's descendants, into the people of the covenant. It is the sign of his submission to the Law (Cf. Gal 4:4) and his

deputation to Israel's worship, in which he will participate throughout his life. This sign prefigures that "circumcision of Christ" which is Baptism (Cf. Col 2:11-13). (CCC 628) Baptism, the original and full sign of which is immersion, efficaciously signifies the descent into the tomb by the Christian who dies to sin with Christ in order to live a new life. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4; cf. Col 2:12; Eph 5:26).

(Col 2, 12-14) You were buried with him in baptism

[12] You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. [13] And even when you were dead (in) transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions; [14] obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross;

(CCC 1002) Christ will raise us up "on the last day"; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ: And you were buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.... If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col 2:12; 3:1). (CCC 1214) This sacrament is called *Baptism*, after the central rite by which it is carried out: to baptize (Greek *baptizein*) means to "plunge" or "immerse"; the "plunge" into the water symbolizes the catechumen's burial into Christ's death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as "a new creature" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Cf. Rom 6:34; Col 2:12). (CCC 1227) According to the Apostle Paul, the believer enters through Baptism into communion with Christ's death, is buried with him, and rises with him: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4; cf. Col 2:12). The baptized have "put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). Through the Holy Spirit, Baptism is a bath that purifies, justifies, and sanctifies (Cf. 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13). (CCC 1694) Incorporated into *Christ* by Baptism, Christians are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" and so participate in the life of the Risen Lord (Rom 6:11 and cf. 6:5; cf. Col 2:12). Following Christ and united with him (Cf. Jn 15:5), Christians can strive to be "imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love" (Eph 5:1-2) by conforming their thoughts, words and actions to the "mind... which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5), and by following his example (Cf. Jn 13:12-16).

(Col 2, 15-17) The reality belongs to Christ

[15] despoiling the principalities and the powers, he made a public spectacle of them, leading them away in triumph by it. [16] Let no one, then, pass judgment on you in matters of food and drink or with regard to a festival or new moon or sabbath. [17] These are shadows of things to come; the reality belongs to Christ.

(CCC 2111) Superstition is the deviation of religious feeling and of the practices this feeling imposes. It can even affect the worship we offer the true God, e.g., when one attributes an importance in some way magical to certain

practices otherwise lawful or necessary. To attribute the efficacy of prayers or of sacramental signs to their mere external performance, apart from the interior dispositions that they demand, is to fall into superstition (Cf. Mt 23:16-22). (CCC 2138) Superstition is a departure from the worship that we give to the true God. It is manifested in idolatry, as well as in various forms of divination and magic. (CCC 2110) The first commandment forbids honoring gods other than the one Lord who has revealed himself to his people. It proscribes superstition and irreligion. Superstition in some sense represents a perverse excess of religion; irreligion is the vice contrary by defect to the virtue of religion.

(Col 2, 18-19) Let no one disqualify you

[18] Let no one disqualify you, delighting in self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, inflated without reason by his fleshly mind, [19] and not holding closely to the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and bonds, achieves the growth that comes from God.

(CCC 792) Christ "is the head of the body, the Church" (Col 1:18). He is the principle of creation and redemption. Raised to the Father's glory, "in everything he [is] preeminent" (Col 1:18), especially in the Church, through whom he extends his reign over all things. (CCC 793) *Christ unites us with his Passover*: all his members must strive to resemble him, "until Christ be formed" in them (Gal 4:19). "For this reason we... are taken up into the mysteries of his life, . . . associated with his sufferings as the body with its head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified" (LG 7 § 4; cf. Phil 3:21; Rom 8:17). (CCC 794) *Christ provides for our growth*: to make us grow toward him, our head (Cf. Col 2:19; Eph 4:11-16), he provides in his Body, the Church, the gifts and assistance by which we help one another along the way of salvation.

(Col 2, 20-23) You died with Christ

[20] If you died with Christ to the elemental powers of the world, why do you submit to regulations as if you were still living in the world? [21] "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" [22] These are all things destined to perish with use; they accord with human precepts and teachings. [23] While they have a semblance of wisdom in rigor of devotion and self-abasement (and) severity to the body, they are of no value against gratification of the flesh.

(CCC 578) Jesus, Israel's Messiah and therefore the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, was to fulfil the Law by keeping it in its all embracing detail - according to his own words, down to "the least of these commandments" (Mt 5:19). He is in fact the only one who could keep it perfectly (Cf. Jn 8:46). On their own admission the Jews were never able to observe the Law in its entirety without violating the least of its precepts (Cf. Jn 7:19; Acts 13:38-41; 15:10). This is why every year on the Day of Atonement the children of Israel ask God's forgiveness for their transgressions of the Law. The Law indeed makes up one inseparable whole, and St. James recalls, "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it". (Jas 2:10; cf. Gal 3:10; 5:3). (CCC 579) This principle of integral observance of the Law not only in letter but in spirit was dear to the Pharisees. By giving Israel this principle they had led many Jews of Jesus' time to an extreme religious zeal (Cf. Rom 10:2). This zeal, were it not to lapse into "hypocritical" casuistry (Cf. Mt 15:31; Lk 11:39-54), could only prepare the People for the unprecedented intervention of God through the perfect

fulfilment of the Law by the only Righteous One in place of all sinners (Cf. Isa 53:11; Heb 9:15).

Colossians 3

(Col 3, 1-4) Seek what is above, where Christ is seated

[1] If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. [2] Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. [3] For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

(CCC 655) Finally, Christ's Resurrection - and the risen Christ himself - is the principle and source of our future resurrection: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep... For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20-22). The risen Christ lives in the hearts of his faithful while they await that fulfilment. In Christ, Christians "have tasted... the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:5) and their lives are swept up by Christ into the heart of divine life, so that they may "live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15; cf. Col 3:1-3). (CCC 665) Christ's Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus' humanity into God's heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3). (CCC 1002) Christ will raise us up "on the last day"; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ: And you were buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.... If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col 2:12; 3:1). (CCC 1003) United with Christ by Baptism, believers already truly participate in the heavenly life of the risen Christ, but this life remains "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3; cf. Phil 3:20). The Father has already "raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). Nourished with his body in the Eucharist, we already belong to the Body of Christ. When we rise on the last day we "also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4).

(Col 3, 5-10) Put to death the parts of you that are earthly

[5] Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. [6] Because of these the wrath of God is coming (upon the disobedient). [7] By these you too once conducted yourselves, when you lived in that way. [8] But now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. [9] Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator.

(CCC 1420) Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, man receives the new life of Christ. Now we carry this life "in earthen vessels," and it remains "hidden with Christ in God" (2 Cor 4:7; Col 3:3). We are still in our "earthly tent," subject to suffering, illness, and death (2 Cor 5:1). This new life as a child of God can be weakened and even lost by sin. (CCC 1852) There are a great

many kinds of sins. Scripture provides several lists of them. The *Letter to the Galatians* contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit: "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God" (Gal 5:19-21; cf. Rom 1:28-32; 1 Cor 9-10; Eph 5:3-5; Col 3:5-8; 1 Tim 9-10; 2 Tim 2-5). (CCC 1972) The New Law is called a *law of love* because it makes us act out of the love infused by the Holy Spirit, rather than from fear; a *law of grace*, because it confers the strength of grace to act, by means of faith and the sacraments; a *law of freedom*, because it sets us free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Old Law, inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity and, finally, lets us pass from the condition of a servant who "does not know what his master is doing" to that of a friend of Christ - "For all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" - or even to the status of son and heir (Jn 15:15; cf. Jas 1:25; 2:12; Gal 4:1-7. 21-31; Rom 8:15).

(Col 3, 11-13) Christ is all and in all

[11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.

[12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.

(CCC 2809) The holiness of God is the inaccessible center of his eternal mystery. What is revealed of it in creation and history, Scripture calls "glory," the radiance of his majesty (Cf. Ps 8; Isa 6:3). In making man in his image and likeness, God "crowned him with glory and honor," but by sinning, man fell "short of the glory of God" (Ps 8:5; Rom 3:23; cf. Gen 1:26). From that time on, God was to manifest his holiness by revealing and giving his name, in order to restore man to the image of his Creator (Col 3:10). (CCC 1971) To the Lord's Sermon on the Mount it is fitting to add the *moral catechesis of the apostolic teachings*, such as *Romans* 12-15, *1 Corinthians* 12-13, *Colossians* 3-4, *Ephesians* 4-5, etc. This doctrine hands on the Lord's teaching with the authority of the apostles, particularly in the presentation of the virtues that flow from faith in Christ and are animated by charity, the principal gift of the Holy Spirit. "Let charity be genuine.... Love one another with brotherly affection.... Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality" (Rom 12:9-13). This catechesis also teaches us to deal with cases of conscience in the light of our relationship to Christ and to the Church (Cf. Rom 14; 1 Cor 5-10). (CCC 2518) The sixth beatitude proclaims, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:8). "Pure in heart" refers to those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God's holiness, chiefly in three areas: charity (Cf. 1 Tim 4:3-9; 2 Tim 2:22); chastity or sexual rectitude (Cf. 1 Thess 4:7; Col 3:5; Eph 4:19); love of truth and orthodoxy of faith (Cf. Titus 1:15; 1 Tim 1:3-4; 2 Tim 2:23-26). There is a connection between purity of heart, of body, and of faith: The faithful must believe the articles of the Creed "so that by believing they may obey God, by obeying may live well, by living well may purify their hearts, and with pure hearts may

understand what they believe" (St. Augustine, *De fide et symbolo* 10, 25: PL 40, 196).

(Col 3, 14) Love that is the bond of perfection

[14] And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

(CCC 1844) By charity, we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God. Charity, the form of all the virtues, "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). (CCC 815) What are these bonds of unity? Above all, charity "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). But the unity of the pilgrim Church is also assured by visible bonds of communion: - profession of one faith received from the Apostles; - common celebration of divine worship, especially of the sacraments; - apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders, maintaining the fraternal concord of God's family (Cf. UR 2; LG 14; CIC, can. 205). (CCC 1827) The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14); it is the *form of the virtues*; it articulates and orders them among themselves; it is the source and the goal of their Christian practice. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love, and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love. (CCC 2633) When we share in God's saving love, we understand that *every need* can become the object of petition. Christ, who assumed all things in order to redeem all things, is glorified by what we ask the Father in his name (Cf. Jn 14:13). It is with this confidence that St. James and St. Paul exhort us to pray *at all times* (Cf. Jas 1:5-8; Eph 5:20; Phil 4:6-7; Col 3:16-17; 1 Thess 5:17-18).

(Col 3, 15) Let the peace of Christ control your hearts

[15] And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

(CCC 1360) The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all "thanksgiving." (CCC 1359) The Eucharist, the sacrament of our salvation accomplished by Christ on the cross, is also a sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for the work of creation. In the Eucharistic sacrifice the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and the Resurrection of Christ. Through Christ the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all that God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity. (CCC 1361) The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of praise by which the Church sings the glory of God in the name of all creation. This sacrifice of praise is possible only through Christ: he unites the faithful to his person, to his praise, and to his intercession, so that the sacrifice of praise to the Father is offered *through* Christ and *with* him, to be accepted *in* him. (CCC 2796) When the Church prays "our Father who art in heaven," she is professing that we are the People of God, already seated "with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" and "hidden with Christ in God" (Eph 2:6; Col 3:3); yet at the same time, "here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling" (2 Cor 5:2; cf. Phil 3:20; Heb 13:14). [Christians] are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. They spend their lives on earth, but are citizens of heaven (*Ad Diognetum* 5: PG 2, 1173). (CCC 2097) To adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the "nothingness of the creature" who would not exist but for God. To adore God is to praise and exalt him and to humble oneself,

as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that he has done great things and holy is his name (cf. Lk 1:46-49). The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world.

(Col 3, 16-17) Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus

[16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

(CCC 2641) "[Address] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart" (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Like the inspired writers of the New Testament, the first Christian communities read the Book of Psalms in a new way, singing in it the mystery of Christ. In the newness of the Spirit, they also composed hymns and canticles in the light of the unheard-of event that God accomplished in his Son: his Incarnation, his death which conquered death, his Resurrection, and Ascension to the right hand of the Father (Cf. Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; Eph 5:14; 1 Tim 3:16; 6:15-16; 2 Tim 2:11-13). Doxology, the praise of God, arises from this "marvelous work" of the whole economy of salvation (Cf. Eph 1:3-14; Rom 16:25-27; Eph 3:20-21; Jude 24-25). (CCC 1156) "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy" (SC 112). The composition and singing of inspired psalms, often accompanied by musical instruments, were already closely linked to the liturgical celebrations of the Old Covenant. The Church continues and develops this tradition: "Address ... one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart." "He who sings prays twice" (Eph 5:19; St. Augustine, *En. in Ps.* 72,1: PL 36, 914; cf. Col 3:16). (CCC 1157) Song and music fulfill their function as signs in a manner all the more significant when they are "more closely connected... with the liturgical action" (SC 112 § 3), according to three principal criteria: beauty expressive of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments, and the solemn character of the celebration. In this way they participate in the purpose of the liturgical words and actions: the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful (Cf. SC 112): How I wept, deeply moved by your hymns, songs, and the voices that echoed through your Church! What emotion I experienced in them! Those sounds flowed into my ears distilling the truth in my heart. A feeling of devotion surged within me, and tears streamed down my face - tears that did me good (St. Augustine, *Conf.* 9, 6, 14: PL 32, 769-770).

(Col 3, 18-19) Husbands love your wives

[18] Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. [19] Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them.

(CCC 2203) In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights, and duties. (CCC 2204) "The

Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*" (*Familiaris consortio*, 21; cf. *Lumen gentium*, 11). It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament (Cf. Eph 5:21b: 4; Col 3:18-21; 1Pet 3:1-7). (CCC 2205) The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task. (CCC 2206) The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members' respect for one another. The family is a *privileged community* called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing" (GS 52 § 1).

(Col 3, 20) Children obey your parents in everything

[20] Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord.

(CCC 2215) Respect for parents (*filial piety*) derives from *gratitude* toward those who, by the gift of life, their love and their work, have brought their children into the world and enabled them to grow in stature, wisdom, and grace. "With all your heart honor your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you?" (Sir 7:27-28). (CCC 2216) Filial respect is shown by true docility and *obedience*. "My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching.... When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you" (Prov 6:20-22). "A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (Prov 13:1). (CCC 2217) As long as a child lives at home with his parents, the child should obey his parents in all that they ask of him when it is for his good or that of the family. "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord" (Col 3:20; cf. Eph 6:1). Children should also obey the reasonable directions of their teachers and all to whom their parents have entrusted them. But if a child is convinced in conscience that it would be morally wrong to obey a particular order, he must not do so. As they grow up, children should continue to respect their parents. They should anticipate their wishes, willingly seek their advice, and accept their just admonitions. Obedience toward parents ceases with the emancipation of the children; not so respect, which is always owed to them. This respect has its roots in the fear of God, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 2218) The fourth commandment reminds grown children of their *responsibilities toward their parents*. As much as they can, they must give them material and moral support in old age and in times of illness, loneliness, or distress. Jesus recalls this duty of gratitude (Cf. Mk 7:10-12). For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother (Sir 3:2-6). O son, help your

father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him.... Whoever forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and whoever angers his mother is cursed by the Lord (Sir 3:12-13, 16).

(Col 3, 21) Fathers do not provoke your children

[21] Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.

(CCC 2223) Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtues*. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones" (CA 36 § 2). Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them: He who loves his son will not spare the rod.... He who disciplines his son will profit by him (Sir 30:1-2). Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). (CCC 2224) The home is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities. Parents should teach children to avoid the compromising and degrading influences which threaten human societies. (CCC 2225) Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of *evangelizing their children*. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church (LG 11 § 2). A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one's life. (CCC 2226) *Education in the faith* by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God (Cf. LG 11). The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents.

(Col 3, 22-25) Whatever you do, do from the heart

[22] Slaves, obey your human masters in everything, not only when being watched, as currying favor, but in simplicity of heart, fearing the Lord. [23] Whatever you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others, [24] knowing that you will receive from the Lord the due payment of the inheritance; be slaves of the Lord Christ. [25] For the wrongdoer will receive recompense for the wrong he committed, and there is no partiality.

(CCC 1929) Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to him: What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to

whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt (John Paul II, SRS 47). (CCC 1930) Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy (Cf. John XXIII, PT 65). If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church's role to remind men of good will of these rights and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims. (CCC 1931) Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity" (GS 27 § 1). No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behavior will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a "neighbor," a brother. (CCC 2235) Those who exercise authority should do so as a service. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mt 20:26). The exercise of authority is measured morally in terms of its divine origin, its reasonable nature and its specific object. No one can command or establish what is contrary to the dignity of persons and the natural law.

Colossians 4

(Col 4, 1) You too have a Master in heaven

[1] Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, realizing that you too have a Master in heaven.

(CCC 1807) *Justice* is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the "virtue of religion." Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor. "You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor" (Lev 19:15). "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven" (Col 4:1).

(Col 4, 2-4) Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it

[2] Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; [3] at the same time, pray for us, too, that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak of the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, [4] that I may make it clear, as I must speak.

(CCC 2638) As in the prayer of petition, every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving. The letters of St. Paul often begin and end with thanksgiving, and the Lord Jesus is always present in it: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"; "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (1 Thess 5:18; Col 4:2). (CCC 2636) The first Christian communities lived this form of fellowship intensely (Cf. Acts 12:5; 20:36; 21:5; 2 Cor 9:14). Thus the Apostle Paul gives

them a share in his ministry of preaching the Gospel (Cf. Eph 6:18-20; Col 4:3-4; 1 Thess 5:25) but also intercedes for them (Cf. 2 Thess 1:11; Col 1:3; Phil 1:3-4). The intercession of Christians recognizes no boundaries: "for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions," for persecutors, for the salvation of those who reject the Gospel (2 Tim 2:1; cf. Rom 12:14; 10:1). (CCC 2849) Such a battle and such a victory become possible only through prayer. It is by his prayer that Jesus vanquishes the tempter, both at the outset of his public mission and in the ultimate struggle of his agony (Cf. Mt 4:1-11; 26:36-44). In this petition to our heavenly Father, Christ unites us to his battle and his agony. He urges us to *vigilance* of the heart in communion with his own. Vigilance is "custody of the heart," and Jesus prayed for us to the Father: "Keep them in your name" (Jn 17:11; Cf. Mk 13:9, 23, 33-37; 14:38; Lk 12:35-40). The Holy Spirit constantly seeks to awaken us to keep watch (Cf. 1 Cor 16:13; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:6; 1 Pet 5:8). Finally, this petition takes on all its dramatic meaning in relation to the last temptation of our earthly battle; it asks for *final perseverance*. "Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake" (Rev 16:15).

(Col 4, 5-6) Let your speech always be gracious

[5] Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. [6] Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you know how you should respond to each one.

(CCC 2500) The practice of goodness is accompanied by spontaneous spiritual joy and moral beauty. Likewise, truth carries with it the joy and splendor of spiritual beauty. Truth is beautiful in itself. Truth in words, the rational expression of the knowledge of created and uncreated reality, is necessary to man, who is endowed with intellect. But truth can also find other complementary forms of human expression, above all when it is a matter of evoking what is beyond words: the depths of the human heart, the exaltations of the soul, the mystery of God. Even before revealing himself to man in words of truth, God reveals himself to him through the universal language of creation, the work of his Word, of his wisdom: the order and harmony of the cosmos - which both the child and the scientist discover - "from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator," "for the author of beauty created them" (Wis 13:3, 5). [Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness (Wis 7:25-26). For [wisdom] is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail (Wis 7:29-30). I became enamored of her beauty (Wis 8:2).

(Col 4, 7-14) That you may be perfect

[7] Tychicus, my beloved brother, trustworthy minister, and fellow slave in the Lord, will tell you all the news of me. [8] I am sending him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us and that he may encourage your hearts, [9] together with Onesimus, a trustworthy and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here. [10] Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you greetings, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions; if he comes to you, receive him), [11] and Jesus, who is called Justus, who are of the circumcision; these alone are my co-workers

for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. [12] Epaphras sends you greetings; he is one of you, a slave of Christ (Jesus), always striving for you in his prayers so that you may be perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. [13] For I can testify that he works very hard for you and for those in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis. [14] Luke the beloved physician sends greetings, as does Demas.

(CCC 2822) Our Father "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:3-4). He "is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish" (2 Pet 3:9; cf. Mt 18:14). His commandment is "that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn 13:34; cf. 1 Jn 3; 4; Lk 10:25-37). This commandment summarizes all the others and expresses his entire will. (CCC 2823) "He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ... to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will" (Eph 1:9-11). We ask insistently for this loving plan to be fully realized on earth as it is already in heaven. (CCC 2824) In Christ, and through his human will, the will of the Father has been perfectly fulfilled once for all. Jesus said on entering into this world: "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:7; Ps 40:7). Only Jesus can say: "I always do what is pleasing to him" (Jn 8:29). In the prayer of his agony, he consents totally to this will: "not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42; cf. Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). For this reason Jesus "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal 1:4). "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10).

(Col 4, 15-16) Greetings to the church in her house

[15] Give greetings to the brothers in Laodicea and to Nympha and to the church in her house. [16] And when this letter is read before you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and you yourselves read the one from Laodicea.

(CCC 1655) Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than "the family of God." From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers "together with all [their] household" (Cf. Acts 18:8). When they were converted, they desired that "their whole household" should also be saved (Cf. Acts 16:31; Acts 11:14). These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world. (CCC 1666) The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called "the domestic church," a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity. (CCC 1658) We must also remember the great number of *single persons* who, because of the particular circumstances in which they have to live - often not of their choosing - are especially close to Jesus' heart and therefore deserve the special affection and active solicitude of the Church, especially of pastors. Many remain *without a human family* often due to conditions of poverty. Some live their situation in the spirit of the Beatitudes, serving God and neighbor in exemplary fashion. The doors of homes, the "domestic churches," and of the great family which is the Church must be open to all of them. "No one is without a family in this world: the

Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who 'labor and are heavy laden'" (FC 85; cf. Mt 11:28).

(Col 4, 17-18) Fulfill the ministry that you received

[17] And tell Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you received in the Lord." [18] The greeting is in my own hand, Paul's. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

(CCC 2039) Ministries should be exercised in a spirit of fraternal service and dedication to the Church, in the name of the Lord (Cf. Rom 12:8, 11). At the same time the conscience of each person should avoid confining itself to individualistic considerations in its moral judgments of the person's own acts. As far as possible conscience should take account of the good of all, as expressed in the moral law, natural and revealed, and consequently in the law of the Church and in the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium on moral questions. Personal conscience and reason should not be set in opposition to the moral law or the Magisterium of the Church. (CCC 2040) Thus a true *filial spirit toward the Church* can develop among Christians. It is the normal flowering of the baptismal grace which has begotten us in the womb of the Church and made us members of the Body of Christ. In her motherly care, the Church grants us the mercy of God which prevails over all our sins and is especially at work in the sacrament of reconciliation. With a mother's foresight, she also lavishes on us day after day in her liturgy the nourishment of the Word and Eucharist of the Lord.