

Letter to Hebrews

Hebrews 1

(Heb 1, 1-2) In these days God spoke to us through a son

[1] In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; [2] in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe,

(CCC 65) "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2). Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one. St. John of the Cross, among others, commented strikingly on *Hebrews* 1:1-2: In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word - and he has no more to say... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son. Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty [St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* 2, 22, 3-5 in *The Collected Works*, tr. K. Kavanaugh, OCD and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 179-180: *LH*, OR Advent, wk 2, Mon.]. (CCC 102) Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely (Cf. Heb 1:1-3): You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time (St. Augustine, *En. in Ps.* 103, 4, 1: PL 37, 1378; cf. Ps 104; Jn 1:1).

(Heb 1, 3) Who is the refulgence of his glory

[3] who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word. When he had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

(CCC 2777) In the Roman liturgy, the Eucharistic assembly is invited to pray to our heavenly Father with filial boldness; the Eastern liturgies develop and use similar expressions: "dare in all confidence," "make us worthy of..." From the burning bush Moses heard a voice saying to him, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex 3:5). Only Jesus could cross that threshold of the divine holiness, for "when he had made purification for sins," he brought us into the Father's presence: "Here am I, and the children God has given me" (Heb 1:3; 2:13). Our awareness of our status as slaves would make us sink into the ground and our earthly condition would dissolve into dust, if the authority of our Father himself and the Spirit of his Son had not impelled us to this cry... 'Abba, Father!'... When would a mortal dare call God 'Father,' if man's innermost being were not animated

by power from on high?" (St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 71, 3: PL 52, 401CD; cf. Gal 4:6). (CCC 2795) The symbol of the heavens refers us back to the mystery of the covenant we are living when we pray to our Father. He is in heaven, his dwelling place; the Father's house is our homeland. Sin has exiled us from the land of the covenant (Cf. Gen 3), but conversion of heart enables us to return to the Father, to heaven (Jer 3:19-4:1a; Lk 15:18, 21). In Christ, then, heaven and earth are reconciled (Cf. Isa 45:8; Ps 85:12), for the Son alone "descended from heaven" and causes us to ascend there with him, by his Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension (Jn 3:13; 12:32; 14 2-3; 16:28; 20:17; Eph 4:9-10; Heb 1:3; 2:13).

(Heb 1, 4-5) You are my son; this day I have begotten you

[4] as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. [5] For to which of the angels did God ever say: "You are my son; this day I have begotten you"? Or again: "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me"?

(CCC 320) God created the universe and keeps it in existence by his Word, the Son "upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb 1:3), and by his Creator Spirit, the giver of life. (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 209) Out of respect for the holiness of God, the people of Israel do not pronounce his name. In the reading of Sacred Scripture, the revealed name (Yhwh) is replaced by the divine title "LORD" (in Hebrew *Adonai*, in Greek *Kyrios*). It is under this title that the divinity of Jesus will be acclaimed: "Jesus is LORD." (CCC 2502) *Sacred art* is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God - the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, who "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature," in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Heb 1:3; Col 2:9). This spiritual beauty of God is reflected in the most holy Virgin Mother of God, the angels, and saints. Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier. (CCC 2503) For this reason bishops, personally or through delegates, should see to the promotion of sacred art, old and new, in all its forms and, with the same religious care, remove from the liturgy and from places of worship everything which is not in conformity with the truth of faith and the authentic beauty of sacred art (Cf. SC 122-127).

(Heb 1, 6) Let all the angels of God worship him

[6] And again, when he leads the first-born into the world, he says: "Let all the angels of God worship him."

(CCC 2628) *Adoration* is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us (Cf. Ps 95:1-6) and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the "King of Glory" (Ps 24, 9-10) respectful silence in the presence of the "ever greater" God (Cf. St. Augustine, *En. in Ps.* 62, 16: PL 36, 757-758). Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications. (CCC 1352) The *anaphora*: with the Eucharistic Prayer - the prayer of thanksgiving and consecration - we come to the heart and summit of the celebration: In the *preface*,

the Church gives thanks to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, for all his works: creation, redemption, and sanctification. The whole community thus joins in the unending praise that the Church in heaven, the angels and all the saints, sing to the thrice-holy God. (CCC 1192) Sacred images in our churches and homes are intended to awaken and nourish our faith in the mystery of Christ. Through the icon of Christ and his works of salvation, it is he whom we adore. Through sacred images of the holy Mother of God, of the angels and of the saints, we venerate the persons represented. (CCC 2131) Basing itself on the mystery of the incarnate Word, the seventh ecumenical council at Nicaea (787) justified against the iconoclasts the veneration of icons - of Christ, but also of the Mother of God, the angels, and all the saints. By becoming incarnate, the Son of God introduced a new "economy" of images.

(Heb 1, 7) He makes his angels winds

[7] Of the angels he says: "He makes his angels winds and his ministers a fiery flame";

(CCC 1161) All the signs in the liturgical celebrations are related to Christ: as are sacred images of the holy Mother of God and of the saints as well. They truly signify Christ, who is glorified in them. They make manifest the "cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1) who continue to participate in the salvation of the world and to whom we are united, above all in sacramental celebrations. Through their icons, it is man "in the image of God," finally transfigured "into his likeness" (Cf. Rom 8:29; 1 Jn 3:2), who is revealed to our faith. So too are the angels, who also are recapitulated in Christ: Following the divinely inspired teaching of our holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church (for we know that this tradition comes from the Holy Spirit who dwells in her) we rightly define with full certainty and correctness that, like the figure of the precious and life-giving cross, venerable and holy images of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, our inviolate Lady, the holy Mother of God, and the venerated angels, all the saints and the just, whether painted or made of mosaic or another suitable material, are to be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, walls and panels, in houses and on streets (Council of Nicaea II: DS 600). (CCC 1162) "The beauty of the images moves me to contemplation, as a meadow delights the eyes and subtly infuses the soul with the glory of God" (St. John Damascene, *De imag.* 1, 27: PG 94, 1268A, B). Similarly, the contemplation of sacred icons, united with meditation on the Word of God and the singing of liturgical hymns, enters into the harmony of the signs of celebration so that the mystery celebrated is imprinted in the heart's memory and is then expressed in the new life of the faithful.

(Heb 1, 8-9) Your throne, O God, stands forever and ever

[8] but of the Son: "Your throne, O God, stands forever and ever; and a righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. [9] You loved justice and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions";

(CCC 1137) The book of *Revelation* of St. John, read in the Church's liturgy, first reveals to us, "A throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne": "the Lord God" (Rev 4:2, 8; Isa 6:1; cf. Ezek 1:26-28). It then shows the Lamb, "standing, as though it had been slain": Christ crucified and risen, the one high priest of the true sanctuary, the same one "who offers and is offered, who gives and is given" (Rev 5:6; Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Anaphora; cf. Jn

1:29; Heb 4:14-15; 10:19-2). Finally it presents "the river of the water of life... Flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb," one of most beautiful symbols of the Holy Spirit (Rev 22:1; cf. 21:6; Jn 4:10-14). (CCC 1138) "Recapitulated in Christ," these are the ones who take part in the service of the praise of God and the fulfillment of his plan: the heavenly powers, all creation (the four living beings), the servants of the Old and New Covenants (the twenty-four elders), the new People of God (the one hundred and forty-four thousand) (Cf. Rev 4- 5; 7:1-8; 14:1; Isa 6:2-3), especially the martyrs "slain for the word of God," and the all-holy Mother of God (the Woman), the Bride of the Lamb (Rev 6:9-11; Rev 21:9; cf. 12), and finally "a great multitude which no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes, and peoples and tongues" (Rev 7:9). (CCC 1136) Liturgy is an "action" of the *whole Christ (Christus totus)*. Those who even now celebrate it without signs are already in the heavenly liturgy, where celebration is wholly communion and feast.

(Heb 1, 10-12) O Lord, you established the earth

[10] and: "At the beginning, O Lord, you established the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. [11] They will perish, but you remain; and they will all grow old like a garment. [12] You will roll them up like a cloak, and like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end."

(CCC 325) The Apostles' Creed professes that God is "creator of heaven and earth". The Nicene Creed makes it explicit that this profession includes "all that is, seen and unseen". (CCC 286) Human intelligence is surely already capable of finding a response to the question of origins. The existence of God the Creator can be known with certainty through his works, by the light of human reason (Cf. Vatican Council I, can. 2 § I: DS 3026) even if this knowledge is often obscured and disfigured by error. This is why faith comes to confirm and enlighten reason in the correct understanding of this truth: "By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear" (Heb 11:3). (CCC 1352) The *anaphora*: with the Eucharistic Prayer - the prayer of thanksgiving and consecration - we come to the heart and summit of the celebration: In the *preface*, the Church gives thanks to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, for all his works: creation, redemption, and sanctification. The whole community thus joins in the unending praise that the Church in heaven, the angels and all the saints, sing to the thrice-holy God. (CCC 1192) Sacred images in our churches and homes are intended to awaken and nourish our faith in the mystery of Christ. Through the icon of Christ and his works of salvation, it is he whom we adore. Through sacred images of the holy Mother of God, of the angels and of the saints, we venerate the persons represented.

(Heb 1, 13-14) Angels ministering spirits sent to serve

[13] But to which of the angels has he ever said: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool"? [14] Are they not all ministering spirits sent to serve, for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

(CCC 446) In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the ineffable Hebrew name YHWH, by which God revealed himself to Moses (Cf. Ex 3:14), is rendered as *Kyrios*, "Lord". From then on, "*Lord*" becomes the more usual name by which to indicate the divinity of Israel's God. The New Testament uses this full sense of the title "Lord" both for the Father and - what is new - for Jesus, who

is thereby recognized as God Himself (Cf. 1 Cor 2:8). (CCC 447) Jesus ascribes this title to himself in a veiled way when he disputes with the Pharisees about the meaning of *Psalms* 110, but also in an explicit way when he addresses his apostles (Cf. Mt 22:41-46; cf. Acts 2:34-36; Heb 1:13; Jn 13:13). Throughout his public life, he demonstrated his divine sovereignty by works of power over nature, illnesses, demons, death and sin. (CCC 333) From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word incarnate is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels. When God "brings the firstborn into the world, he says: 'Let all God's angels worship him'" (Heb 1:6). Their song of praise at the birth of Christ has not ceased resounding in the Church's praise: "Glory to God in the highest!" (Lk 2:14). They protect Jesus in his infancy, serve him in the desert, strengthen him in his agony in the garden, when he could have been saved by them from the hands of his enemies as Israel had been (Cf. Mt 1:20; 2:13,19; 4:11; 26:53; Mk 1:13; Lk 22:43; 2 Macc 10:29-30; 11:8). Again, it is the angels who "evangelize" by proclaiming the Good News of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection (Cf. Lk 2:8-14; Mk 16:5-7). They will be present at Christ's return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgement. (Cf. Acts 1:10-11; Mt 13:41; 24:31; Lk 12:8-9). (CCC 311 Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has moral evil, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil (Cf. St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* 1, 1, 2: PL 32, 1223; St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I-II, 79, 1). He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it: For almighty God..., because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself (St. Augustine, *Enchiridion* 3, 11: PL 40, 236).

Hebrews 2

(Heb 2, 1-4) God added his testimony by signs, wonders

[1] Therefore, we must attend all the more to what we have heard, so that we may not be carried away. [2] For if the word announced through angels proved firm, and every transgression and disobedience received its just recompense, [3] how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? Announced originally through the Lord, it was confirmed for us by those who had heard. [4] God added his testimony by signs, wonders, various acts of power, and distribution of the gifts of the holy Spirit according to his will.

(CCC 156) What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe "because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived" (*Dei Filius* 3: DS 3008). So "that the submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason, God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit" (*Dei Filius* 3: DS 3009). Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth and holiness, and her fruitfulness and stability "are the most certain signs of divine Revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all"; they are "motives of credibility" (*motiva credibilitatis*), which show that the assent of faith

is "by no means a blind impulse of the mind" (*Dei Filius* 3: DS 3008-3010; cf. Mk 16 20; Heb 2:4). (CCC 157) Faith is *certain*. It is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie. To be sure, revealed truths can seem obscure to human reason and experience, but "the certainty that the divine light gives is greater than that which the light of natural reason gives" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II-II 171, 5, obj. 3). "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt" (John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (London: Longman, 1878) 239).

(Heb 2, 5-8) What is man that you are mindful of him?

[5] For it was not to angels that he subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. [6] Instead, someone has testified somewhere: "What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? [7] You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, [8] subjecting all things under his feet." In "subjecting" all things (to him), he left nothing not "subject to him." Yet at present we do not see "all things subject to him,"

(CCC 343) *Man is the summit* of the Creator's work, as the inspired account expresses by clearly distinguishing the creation of man from that of the other creatures (Cf. Gen 1-26). (CCC 382) "Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity" (GS 14 § 1). The doctrine of the faith affirms that the spiritual and immortal soul is created immediately by God. (CCC 383) "God did not create man a solitary being. From the beginning, "male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). This partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons" (GS 12 § 4). (CCC 384) Revelation makes known to us the state of original holiness and justice of man and woman before sin: from their friendship with God flowed the happiness of their existence in paradise. (CCC 374) The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him, in a state that would be surpassed only by the glory of the new creation in Christ. (CCC 375) The Church, interpreting the symbolism of biblical language in an authentic way, in the light of the New Testament and Tradition, teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original "state of holiness and justice" (Cf. Council of Trent (1546): DS 1511). This grace of original holiness was "to share in... divine life" (Cf. LG 2). (CCC 377) The "mastery" over the world that God offered man from the beginning was realized above all within man himself: *mastery of self*. The first man was unimpaired and ordered in his whole being because he was free from the triple concupiscence (Cf. I Jn 2:16) that subjugates him to the pleasures of the senses, covetousness for earthly goods, and self-assertion, contrary to the dictates of reason. (CCC 378) The sign of man's familiarity with God is that God places him in the garden (Cf. Gen 2:8). There he lives "to till it and keep it". Work is not yet a burden (Gen 2:15; cf. 3:17-19), but rather the collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation. (CCC 379) This entire harmony of original justice, foreseen for man in God's plan, will be lost by the sin of our first parents.

(Heb 2, 9) Jesus "crowned with glory and honor"

[9] but we do see Jesus "crowned with glory and honor" because he suffered death, he who "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels," that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

(CCC 357) Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead. (CCC 359) "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (GS 22 § 1). St. Paul tells us that the human race takes its origin from two men: Adam and Christ.... The first man, Adam, he says, became a living soul, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. The first Adam was made by the last Adam, from whom he also received his soul, to give him life... The second Adam stamped his image on the first Adam when he created him. That is why he took on himself the role and the name of the first Adam, in order that he might not lose what he had made in his own image. The first Adam, the last Adam: the first had a beginning, the last knows no end. The last Adam is indeed the first; as he himself says: "I am the first and the last" (St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 117: PL 52, 520-521). (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). (CCC 629) To the benefit of every man, Jesus Christ tasted death (cf. Heb 2:9). It is truly the Son of God made man who died and was buried.

(Heb 2, 10-13) I will put my trust in him

[10] For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. [11] He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them "brothers," [12] saying: "I will proclaim your name to my brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will praise you"; [13] and again: "I will put my trust in him"; and again: "Behold, I and the children God has given me."

(CCC 609) By embracing in his human heart the Father's love for men, Jesus "loved them to the end", for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 13:1; 15:13). In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which desires the salvation of men (Cf. Heb 2:10, 17-18; 4:15; 5:7-9). Indeed, out of love for his Father and for men, whom the Father wants to save, Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn 10:18). Hence the sovereign freedom of God's Son as he went out to his death (Cf. Jn 18:4-6; Mt 26:53). (CCC 2602) Jesus often draws apart to pray *in solitude*, on a mountain, preferably at night (Cf. Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 5:16). *He includes all men* in his prayer, for he has taken on humanity in his incarnation, and he offers them to the Father when he offers himself. Jesus, the Word who has become flesh, shares by his human prayer in all that "his brethren" experience; he

sympathizes with their weaknesses in order to free them (Cf. Heb 2:12, 15; 4:15). It was for this that the Father sent him. His words and works are the visible manifestation of his prayer in secret.

(Heb 2, 14-15) The children share in blood and flesh

[14] Now since the children share in blood and flesh, he likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life.

(CCC 635) Christ went down into the depths of death so that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (Jn 5:25; cf. Mt 12:40; Rom 10:7; Eph 4:9). Jesus, "the Author of life", by dying destroyed "him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb 2:14-15; cf. Acts 3:15). Henceforth the risen Christ holds "the keys of Death and Hades", so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Rev 1:18; Phil 2:10). Today a great silence reigns on earth, a great silence and a great stillness. A great silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began.... He has gone to search for Adam, our first father, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow Adam in his bonds and Eve, captive with him - He who is both their God and the son of Eve.... "I am your God, who for your sake have become your son.... I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead" (Ancient Homily for Holy Saturday: PG 43, 440A, 452C; *LH*, Holy Saturday, OR).

(Heb 2, 16-18) A merciful and faithful high priest

[16] Surely he did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; [17] therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. [18] Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

(CCC 407) The doctrine of original sin, closely connected with that of redemption by Christ, provides lucid discernment of man's situation and activity in the world. By our first parents' sin, the devil has acquired a certain domination over man, even though man remains free. Original sin entails "captivity under the power of him who thenceforth had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Council of Trent (1546): DS 1511; cf. Heb 2:14). Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action (Cf. John Paul II, CA 25) and morals. (CCC 637) In his human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead. He opened heaven's gates for the just who had gone before him. (CCC 636) By the expression "He descended into hell", the Apostles' Creed confesses that Jesus did really die and through his death for us conquered death and the devil "who has the power of death" (Heb 2:14).

Hebrews 3

(Heb 3, 1-4) Jesus is worthy of more "glory" than Moses

[1] Therefore, holy "brothers," sharing in a heavenly calling, reflect on Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, [2] who was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was "faithful in (all) his house." [3] But he is worthy of more "glory" than Moses, as the founder of a house has more "honor" than the house itself. [4] Every house is founded by someone, but the founder of all is God.

(CCC 117) The *spiritual sense*. Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs. 1. The *allegorical sense*. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian Baptism (Cf. 1 Cor 10:2). 2. The *moral sense*. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written "for our instruction" (1 Cor 10:11; cf. Heb 3-4:11). 3. The *anagogical sense* (Greek: *anagoge*, "leading"). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem (Cf. Rev 21:1-22:5). (CCC 118) A medieval couplet summarizes the significance of the four senses: The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith; The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny (Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia. Augustine of Dacia, *Rotulus pugillaris*, I). (CCC 119) "It is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, towards a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgement. For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgement of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God" (DV 12 § 3). But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me (St. Augustine, *Contra epistolam Manichaei* 5, 6: PL 42, 176). (CCC 132) "Therefore, the study of the sacred page should be the very soul of sacred theology. The ministry of the Word, too - pastoral preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold pride of place - is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture" (DV 24).

(Heb 3, 5-6) Christ was faithful as a son, we are his house

[5] Moses was "faithful in all his house" as a "servant" to testify to what would be spoken, [6] but Christ was faithful as a son placed over his house. We are his house, if (only) we hold fast to our confidence and pride in our hope.

(CCC 454) The title "Son of God" signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father: he is the only Son of the Father (cf. Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18); he is God himself (cf. Jn 1:1). To be a Christian, one must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (cf. Acts 8:37; 1 Jn 2:23). (CCC 2778) This power of the Spirit who introduces us to the Lord's Prayer is expressed in the liturgies of East and of West by the beautiful, characteristically Christian expression: *parrhesia*, straightforward simplicity, filial trust, joyous assurance, humble boldness, the certainty of being loved (Cf. Eph 3:12; Heb 3:6; 4:16;

10:19; 1 Jn 2:28; 3:21; 5:14). (CCC 2828) "*Give us*": the trust of children who look to their Father for everything is beautiful. "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:45). He gives to all the living "their food in due season" (Ps 104:27). Jesus teaches us this petition, because it glorifies our Father by acknowledging how good he is, beyond all goodness. (CCC 2829) "Give us" also expresses the covenant. We are his and he is ours, for our sake. But this "us" also recognizes him as the Father of all men and we pray to him for them all, in solidarity with their needs and sufferings.

(Heb 3, 7-9) Oh, that today you would hear his voice

[7] Therefore, as the holy Spirit says: "Oh, that today you would hear his voice, [8] 'Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion in the day of testing in the desert, [9] where your ancestors tested and tried me and saw my works for forty years.

(CCC 1165) When the Church celebrates the mystery of Christ, there is a word that marks her prayer: "Today!" - a word echoing the prayer her Lord taught her and the call of the Holy Spirit (Cf. Mt 6:11; Heb 3:7- 4:11; Ps 95:7). This "today" of the living God which man is called to enter is "the hour" of Jesus' Passover, which reaches across and underlies all history: Life extends over all beings and fills them with unlimited light; the Orient of orients pervades the universe, and he who was "before the daystar" and before the heavenly bodies, immortal and vast, the great Christ, shines over all beings more brightly than the sun. Therefore a day of long, eternal light is ushered in for us who believe in him, a day which is never blotted out: the mystical Passover (St. Hippolytus, *De pasch.* 1-2 SCh 27, 117). (CCC 2836) "*This day*" is also an expression of trust taught us by the Lord (Cf. Mt 6:34; Ex 16:19), which we would never have presumed to invent. Since it refers above all to his Word and to the Body of his Son, this "today" is not only that of our mortal time, but also the "today" of God. If you receive the bread each day, each day is today for you. If Christ is yours today, he rises for you every day. How can this be? "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." Therefore, "today" is when Christ rises (St. Ambrose, *De Sacr.* 5, 4, 26: PL 16, 453A; cf. Ps 2:7). (CCC 144) To obey (from the Latin *ob-audire*, to "hear or listen to") in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself. Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture. The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment. (CCC 615) "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). By his obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who "makes himself an *offering for sin*", when "he bore the sin of many", and who "shall make many to be accounted righteous", for "he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:10-12). Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father (Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1529).

(Heb 3, 10-11) They have always been of erring heart

[10] Because of this I was provoked with that generation and I said, "They have always been of erring heart, and they do not know my ways." [11] As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter into my rest."

(CCC 844) In their religious behavior, however, men also display the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them: Very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the creature rather than the Creator. Or else,

living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair (LG 16; cf. Rom 1:21, 25). (CCC 846) [Outside the Church there is no salvation] How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? (Cf. Cyprian, *Ep.* 73.21: PL 3, 1169; *De unit.:* PL 4, 509-536). Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body: Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it (LG 14; cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5). (CCC 847) This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation (LG 16; cf. DS 3866-3872). (CCC 848) "Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men" (AG 7; cf. Heb 11:6; 1 Cor 9:16).

(Heb 3, 12-14) We have become partners of Christ

[12] Take care, brothers, that none of you may have an evil and unfaithful heart, so as to forsake the living God. [13] Encourage yourselves daily while it is still "today," so that none of you may grow hardened by the deceit of sin. [14] We have become partners of Christ if only we hold the beginning of the reality firm until the end,

(CCC 1084) "Seated at the right hand of the Father" and pouring out the Holy Spirit on his Body which is the Church, Christ now acts through the sacraments he instituted to communicate his grace. The sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify. (CCC 148) The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that "with God nothing will be impossible" and so giving her assent: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word" (Lk 1:37-38; cf. Gen 18:14). Elizabeth greeted her: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed (Cf. Lk 1:48). (CCC 532) Jesus' obedience to his mother and legal father fulfills the fourth commandment perfectly and was the temporal image of his filial obedience to his Father in heaven. The everyday obedience of Jesus to Joseph and Mary both announced and anticipated the obedience of Holy Thursday: "Not my will..." (Lk 22:42). The obedience of Christ in the daily routine of his hidden life was already inaugurating his work of restoring what the disobedience of Adam had destroyed (Cf. Rom 5:19). (CCC 614) This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices (Cf. Heb 10:10).

First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience (Cf. Jn 10:17-18, 15:13; Heb 9:14; 1 Jn 4:10).

(Heb 3, 15-19) Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion

[15] for it is said: "Oh, that today you would hear his voice: 'Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion.'" [16] Who were those who rebelled when they heard? Was it not all those who came out of Egypt under Moses? [17] With whom was he "provoked for forty years"? Was it not those who had sinned, whose corpses fell in the desert? [18] And to whom did he "swear that they should not enter into his rest," if not to those who were disobedient? [19] And we see that they could not enter for lack of faith.

(CCC 2659) We learn to pray at certain moments by hearing the Word of the Lord and sharing in his Paschal mystery, but his Spirit is offered us at all times, in the events of *each day*, to make prayer spring up from us. Jesus' teaching about praying to our Father is in the same vein as his teaching about providence (Cf. Mt 6:11, 34): time is in the Father's hands; it is in the present that we encounter him, not yesterday nor tomorrow, but today: "O that *today* you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts" (Ps 95:7-8). (CCC 1085) In the liturgy of the Church, it is principally his own Paschal mystery that Christ signifies and makes present. During his earthly life Jesus announced his Paschal mystery by his teaching and anticipated it by his actions. When his Hour comes, he lives out the unique event of history which does not pass away: Jesus dies, is buried, rises from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father "once for all" (Rom 6:10; Heb 7:27; 9:12; cf. Jn 13:1; 17:1). His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is - all that he did and suffered for all men - participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection *abides* and draws everything toward life. (CCC 1271) Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church: "For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church" (UR 3). "Baptism therefore constitutes *the sacramental bond of unity* existing among all who through it are reborn" (UR 22 § 2).

Hebrews 4

(Heb 4, 1) The promise of entering into his rest remains

[1] Therefore, let us be on our guard while the promise of entering into his rest remains, that none of you seem to have failed.

(CCC 2579) David is par excellence the king "after God's own heart," the shepherd who prays for his people and prays in their name. His submission to the will of God, his praise, and his repentance, will be a model for the prayer of the people. His prayer, the prayer of God's Anointed, is a faithful adherence to the divine promise and expresses a loving and joyful trust in God, the only King and Lord (Cf. 2 Sam 7:18-29). In the Psalms David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the first prophet of Jewish and Christian prayer. The prayer of Christ, the true Messiah and Son of David, will reveal and fulfill the meaning of this prayer. (CCC 1185) The gathering of the People of God begins with Baptism; a church must have a place for the celebration of *Baptism* (baptistry) and for fostering remembrance of the baptismal promises (holy water font). The renewal of the baptismal life requires *penance*. A church, then, must lend itself to the expression of repentance and the reception of forgiveness, which requires an appropriate place to receive penitents. A church must also be a space that invites us to the recollection and silent prayer that extend and internalize the great prayer of the Eucharist. (CCC 1254) For all the baptized, children or adults, faith must grow *after* Baptism. For this reason the Church celebrates each year at the Easter Vigil the renewal of baptismal promises. Preparation for Baptism leads only to the threshold of new life. Baptism is the source of that new life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs forth. (CCC 1298) When Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, as is the case in the Roman Rite, the Liturgy of Confirmation begins with the renewal of baptismal promises and the profession of faith by the confirmands. This clearly shows that Confirmation follows Baptism (Cf. SC 71). When adults are baptized, they immediately receive Confirmation and participate in the Eucharist (Cf. CIC, can. 866). (CCC 2147) *Promises* made to others in God's name engage the divine honor, fidelity, truthfulness, and authority. They must be respected in justice. To be unfaithful to them is to misuse God's name and in some way to make God out to be a liar (Cf. 1 Jn 1:10).

(Heb 4, 2) In fact we have received the good news

[2] For in fact we have received the good news just as they did. But the word that they heard did not profit them, for they were not united in faith with those who listened.

(CCC 1100) *The Word of God*. The Holy Spirit first recalls the meaning of the salvation event to the liturgical assembly by giving life to the Word of God, which is proclaimed so that it may be received and lived: In the celebration of the liturgy, Sacred Scripture is extremely important. From it come the lessons that are read and explained in the homily and the psalms that are sung. It is from the Scriptures that the prayers, collects, and hymns draw their inspiration and their force, and that actions and signs derive their meaning (SC 24). (CCC 1176) The celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours demands not only harmonizing the voice with the praying heart, but also a deeper "understanding of the liturgy and of the Bible, especially of the Psalms" (SC 90). (CCC 2587) The Psalter is the book in which the Word of God becomes man's prayer. In other books of the Old Testament, "the words proclaim [God's] works and bring to light the mystery they contain" (DV 2). The words of the Psalmist, sung for God, both express and acclaim the Lord's saving works; the same Spirit inspires both God's work and man's response. Christ will unite the two. In him, the psalms continue to teach us how to pray. (CCC 1160) Christian iconography expresses in images the same

Gospel message that Scripture communicates by words. Image and word illuminate each other: We declare that we preserve intact all the written and unwritten traditions of the Church which have been entrusted to us. One of these traditions consists in the production of representational artwork, which accords with the history of the preaching of the Gospel. For it confirms that the incarnation of the Word of God was real and not imaginary, and to our benefit as well, for realities that illustrate each other undoubtedly reflect each other's meaning (Council of Nicaea II (787): COD 111).

(Heb 4, 3) Accomplished at the foundation of the world

[3] For we who believed enter into (that) rest, just as he has said: "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter into my rest,'" and yet his works were accomplished at the foundation of the world.

(CCC 337) God himself created the visible world in all its richness, diversity and order. Scripture presents the work of the Creator symbolically as a succession of six days of divine "work", concluded by the "rest" of the seventh day (Gen 1:1-2:4). On the subject of creation, the sacred text teaches the truths revealed by God for our salvation (Cf. DV 11), permitting us to "recognize the inner nature, the value and the ordering of the whole of creation to the praise of God" (LG 36 § 2). (CCC 342) The *hierarchy of creatures* is expressed by the order of the "six days", from the less perfect to the more perfect. God loves all his creatures (Cf. Ps 145:9) and takes care of each one, even the sparrow. Nevertheless, Jesus said: "You are of more value than many sparrows", or again: "of how much more value is a man than a sheep!" (Lk 12:6-7; Mt 12:12). (CCC 302) Creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created "in a state of journeying" (*in statu viae*) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. We call "divine providence" the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection: By his providence God protects and governs all things which he has made, "reaching mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and ordering all things well". For "all are open and laid bare to his eyes", even those things which are yet to come into existence through the free action of creatures (Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius* I: DS 3003; cf. Wis 8:1; Heb 4:13). (CCC 304) And so we see the Holy Spirit, the principal author of Sacred Scripture, often attributing actions to God without mentioning any secondary causes. This is not a "primitive mode of speech", but a profound way of recalling God's primacy and absolute Lordship over history and the world (Cf. Isa 10:5-15; 45:51; Dt 32:39; Sir 11:14), and so of educating his people to trust in him. The prayer of the Psalms is the great school of this trust (Cf. Pss 22; 32; 35; 103; 138; *et al.*).

(Heb 4, 4) And God rested on the seventh day

[4] For he has spoken somewhere about the seventh day in this manner, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works";

(CCC 2184) Just as God "rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done" (Gen 2:2), human life has a rhythm of work and rest. The institution of the Lord's Day helps everyone enjoy adequate rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social, and religious lives (Cf. GS 67 § 3). (CCC 2185) On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the

appropriate relaxation of mind and body (Cf. CIC, can. 120). Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest. The faithful should see to it that legitimate excuses do not lead to habits prejudicial to religion, family life, and health. The charity of truth seeks holy leisure - the necessity of charity accepts just work (St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 19, 19: PL 41, 647). (CCC 2186) Those Christians who have leisure should be mindful of their brethren who have the same needs and the same rights, yet cannot rest from work because of poverty and misery. Sunday is traditionally consecrated by Christian piety to good works and humble service of the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. Christians will also sanctify Sunday by devoting time and care to their families and relatives, often difficult to do on other days of the week. Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind, and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life. (CCC 1177) The hymns and litanies of the Liturgy of the Hours integrate the prayer of the psalms into the age of the Church, expressing the symbolism of the time of day, the liturgical season, or the feast being celebrated. Moreover, the reading from the Word of God at each Hour (with the subsequent responses or *troparia*) and readings from the Fathers and spiritual masters at certain Hours, reveal more deeply the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, assist in understanding the psalms, and prepare for silent prayer. The *lectio divina*, where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer, is thus rooted in the liturgical celebration.

(Heb 4, 5-6) They shall not enter into my rest

[5] and again, in the previously mentioned place, "They shall not enter into my rest." [6] Therefore, since it remains that some will enter into it, and those who formerly received the good news did not enter because of disobedience,

(CCC 2175) Sunday is expressly distinguished from the sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the sabbath. In Christ's Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish sabbath and announces man's eternal rest in God. For worship under the Law prepared for the mystery of Christ, and what was done there prefigured some aspects of Christ (Cf. 1 Cor 10:11): Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the sabbath, but the Lord's Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Magn.* 9, 1: SCh 10, 88).

(Heb 4, 7) He once more set a day, "today"

[7] he once more set a day, "today," when long afterwards he spoke through David, as already quoted: "Oh, that today you would hear his voice: 'Harden not your hearts.'"

(CCC 2180) The precept of the Church specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass" (CIC, can. 1247). "The precept of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day" (CIC, can. 1248 § 1). (CCC 2179) "A *parish* is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (CIC, can. 515 § 1). It is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates

the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love: You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests (St. John Chrysostom, *De incomprehensibili* 3, 6: PG 48, 725). (CCC 2181) The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor (Cf. CIC, can. 1245). Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin. (CCC 2182) Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(Heb 4, 8-9) A sabbath rest still remains

[8] Now if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken afterwards of another day. [9] Therefore, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God.

(CCC 2189) "Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Deut 5:12). "The seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord" (Ex 31:15). (CCC 2835) This petition, with the responsibility it involves, also applies to another hunger from which men are perishing: "Man does not live by bread alone, but... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Deut 8:3; Mt 4:4), that is, by the Word he speaks and the Spirit he breathes forth. Christians must make every effort "to proclaim the good news to the poor." There is a famine on earth, "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Am 8:11). For this reason the specifically Christian sense of this fourth petition concerns the Bread of Life: the Word of God accepted in faith, the Body of Christ received in the Eucharist (Cf. Jn 6:26-58). (CCC 2653) The Church "forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful... to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures.... Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For 'we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles'" (DV 25; cf. Phil 3:8; St. Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum* 1, 20,88: PL 16, 50). (CCC 2654) The spiritual writers, paraphrasing *Matthew 7:7*, summarize in this way the dispositions of the heart nourished by the word of God in prayer "Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation" (Guigo the Carthusian, *Scala Paradisi*: PL 40, 998). (CCC 2655) In the sacramental liturgy of the Church, the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit proclaims, makes present, and communicates the mystery of salvation, which is continued in the heart that prays. The spiritual writers sometimes compare the heart to an altar. Prayer internalizes and assimilates the liturgy during and after its celebration. Even when it is lived out "in secret" (Cf. Mt 6:6]), prayer is always prayer *of the Church*; it is a communion with the Holy Trinity (GILH 9). (CCC 2656) One enters into prayer as one enters

into liturgy: by the narrow gate of *faith*. Through the signs of his presence, it is the Face of the Lord that we seek and desire; it is his Word that we want to hear and keep.

(Heb 4, 10-11) Let us strive to enter into that rest

[10] And whoever enters into God's rest, rests from his own works as God did from his. [11] Therefore, let us strive to enter into that rest, so that no one may fall after the same example of disobedience.

(CCC 2183) "If because of lack of a sacred minister or for other grave cause participation in the celebration of the Eucharist is impossible, it is specially recommended that the faithful take part in the Liturgy of the Word if it is celebrated in the parish church or in another sacred place according to the prescriptions of the diocesan bishop, or engage in prayer for an appropriate amount of time personally or in a family or, as occasion offers, in groups of families" (CIC, can. 1248 § 2). (CCC 2187) Sanctifying Sundays and holy days requires a common effort. Every Christian should avoid making unnecessary demands on others that would hinder them from observing the Lord's Day. Traditional activities (sport, restaurants, etc.), and social necessities (public services, etc.), require some people to work on Sundays, but everyone should still take care to set aside sufficient time for leisure. With temperance and charity the faithful will see to it that they avoid the excesses and violence sometimes associated with popular leisure activities. In spite of economic constraints, public authorities should ensure citizens a time intended for rest and divine worship. Employers have a similar obligation toward their employees. (CCC 2188) In respecting religious liberty and the common good of all, Christians should seek recognition of Sundays and the Church's holy days as legal holidays. They have to give everyone a public example of prayer, respect, and joy and defend their traditions as a precious contribution to the spiritual life of society. If a country's legislation or other reasons require work on Sunday, the day should nevertheless be lived as the day of our deliverance which lets us share in this "festal gathering," this "assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb 12:22-23).

(Heb 4, 12) The word of God is living and effective

[12] Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.

(CCC 1190) The Liturgy of the Word is an integral part of the celebration. The meaning of the celebration is expressed by the Word of God which is proclaimed and by the response of faith to it. (CCC 1184) The *chair* of the bishop (*cathedra*) or that of the priest "should express his office of presiding over the assembly and of directing prayer" (GIRM 271). The *lectern (ambo)*: "The dignity of the Word of God requires the church to have a suitable place for announcing his message so that the attention of the people may be easily directed to that place during the liturgy of the Word" (GIRM 272).

(Heb 4, 13) To him we must render an account

[13] No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.

(CCC 679) Christ is Lord of eternal life. Full right to pass definitive judgment on the works and hearts of men belongs to him as redeemer of the

world. He "acquired" this right by his cross. The Father has given "all judgement to the Son" (Jn 5:22; cf. 5:27; Mt 25:31; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Tim 4:1). Yet the Son did not come to judge, but to save and to give the life he has in himself (Cf. Jn 3:17; 5:26). By rejecting grace in this life, one already judges oneself, receives according to one's works, and can even condemn oneself for all eternity by rejecting the Spirit of love (Cf. Jn 3:18; 12:48; Mt 12:32; 1 Cor 3:12-15; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31). (CCC 680) Christ the Lord already reigns through the Church, but all the things of this world are not yet subjected to him. The triumph of Christ's kingdom will not come about without one last assault by the powers of evil. (CCC 681) On Judgment Day at the end of the world, Christ will come in glory to achieve the definitive triumph of good over evil which, like the wheat and the tares, have grown up together in the course of history. (CCC 682) When he comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, the glorious Christ will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works, and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace.

(Heb 4, 14) We have a great high priest

[14] Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

(CCC 1544) Everything that the priesthood of the Old Covenant prefigured finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus, the "one mediator between God and men" (2 Tim 2:5). The Christian tradition considers Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High," as a prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ, the unique "high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:10; cf. 6:20; Gen 14:18); "holy, blameless, unstained" (Heb 7:26), "by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:14), that is, by the unique sacrifice of the cross. (CCC 1545) The redemptive sacrifice of Christ is unique, accomplished once for all; yet it is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. The same is true of the one priesthood of Christ; it is made present through the ministerial priesthood without diminishing the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood: "Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Hebr* 8, 4). (CCC 1546) Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church "a kingdom, priests for his God and Father" (Rev 1:6; cf. Rev 5:9-10; 1 Pet 2:5, 9). The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are "consecrated to be... a holy priesthood" (LG 10 § 1).

(Heb 4, 15) Who has similarly been tested in every way

[15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin.

(CCC 540) Jesus' temptation reveals the way in which the Son of God is Messiah, contrary to the way Satan proposes to him and the way men wish to attribute to him (Cf. Mt 16:21-23). This is why Christ vanquished the Tempter *for us*: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15). By the solemn forty days of *Lent* the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert. (CCC 612) The cup of the New

Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father's hands in his agony in the garden at Gethsemani (Cf. Mt 26:42; Lk 22:20), making himself "obedient unto death". Jesus prays: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..." (Phil 2:8; Mt 26:39; cf. Heb 5:7-8). Thus he expresses the horror that death represented for his human nature. Like ours, his human nature is destined for eternal life; but unlike ours, it is perfectly exempt from sin, the cause of death (Cf. Rom 5:12; Heb 4:15). Above all, his human nature has been assumed by the divine person of the "Author of life", the "Living One" (Cf. Acts 3:15; Rev 1:17; Jn 1:4; 5:26). By accepting in his human will that the Father's will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive, for "he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pt 2:24; cf. Mt 26:42). (CCC 1549) Through the ordained ministry, especially that of bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community of believers (Cf. LG 21). In the beautiful expression of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the bishop is *typos tou Patros*: he is like the living image of God the Father (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Trall.* 3, 1: SCh 10, 96; cf. *Ad Magn.* 6, 1: SCh 10, 82-84).

(Heb 4, 16) To receive mercy and to find grace

[16] So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

(CCC 1572) Given the importance that the ordination of a bishop, a priest, or a deacon has for the life of the particular Church, its celebration calls for as many of the faithful as possible to take part. It should take place preferably on Sunday, in the cathedral, with solemnity appropriate to the occasion. All three ordinations, of the bishop, of the priest, and of the deacon, follow the same movement. Their proper place is within the Eucharistic liturgy. (CCC 1563) "Because it is joined with the episcopal order the office of priests shares in the authority by which Christ himself builds up and sanctifies and rules his Body. Hence the priesthood of priests, while presupposing the sacraments of initiation, is nevertheless conferred by its own particular sacrament. Through that sacrament priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head" (PO 2). (CCC 1566) "It is in the Eucharistic cult or in the *Eucharistic assembly* of the faithful (*synaxis*) that they exercise in a supreme degree their sacred office; there, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head, and in the sacrifice of the Mass they make present again and apply, until the coming of the Lord, the unique sacrifice of the New Testament, that namely of Christ offering himself once for all a spotless victim to the Father" (LG 28; cf. 1 Cor 11:26). From this unique sacrifice their whole priestly ministry draws its strength (Cf. PO 2). (CCC 1568) "All priests, who are constituted in the order of priesthood by the sacrament of Order, are bound together by an intimate sacramental brotherhood, but in a special way they form one priestly body in the diocese to which they are attached under their own bishop... (PO 8). The unity of the presbyterium finds liturgical expression in the custom of the presbyters' imposing hands, after the bishop, during the rite of ordination.

Hebrews 5

(Heb 5, 1-3) Every high priest is taken from among men

[1] Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. [2] He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness [3] and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people.

(CCC 1585) The grace of the Holy Spirit proper to this sacrament is configuration to Christ as Priest, Teacher, and Pastor, of whom the ordained is made a minister. (CCC 1581) This sacrament configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ's instrument for his Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet, and king. (CCC 1582) As in the case of Baptism and Confirmation this share in Christ's office is granted once for all. The sacrament of Holy Orders, like the other two, confers an *indelible spiritual character* and cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily (Cf. Council of Trent: 1 DS 1767; LG 21; 28; 29; PO 2). (CCC 1583) It is true that someone validly ordained can, for a just reason, be discharged from the obligations and functions linked to ordination, or can be forbidden to exercise them; but he cannot become a layman again in the strict sense (Cf. CIC, cann. 290-293; 1336 § 1 3°, 5°, 1338 § 2; Council of Trent: DS 1774), because the character imprinted by ordination is for ever. The vocation and mission received on the day of his ordination mark him permanently.

(Heb 5, 4-6) You are a priest forever

[4] No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. [5] In the same way, it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest, but rather the one who said to him: "You are my son; this day I have begotten you"; [6] just as he says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

(CCC 1584) Since it is ultimately Christ who acts and effects salvation through the ordained minister, the unworthiness of the latter does not prevent Christ from acting (Cf. Council of Trent DS 1612; DS 1154). St. Augustine states this forcefully: As for the proud minister, he is to be ranked with the devil. Christ's gift is not thereby profaned: what flows through him keeps its purity, and what passes through him remains dear and reaches the fertile earth.... The spiritual power of the sacrament is indeed comparable to light: those to be enlightened receive it in its purity, and if it should pass through defiled beings, it is not itself defiled (St. Augustine, *In Jo. Ev.* 5, 15: PL 35, 1422). (CCC 1586) For the bishop, this is first of all a grace of strength ("the governing spirit": Prayer of Episcopal Consecration in the Latin rite) (Cf. *Roman Pontifical*, Ordination of Bishops 26, Prayer of Consecration; cf. CD 13; 16): the grace to guide and defend his Church with strength and prudence as a father and pastor, with gratuitous love for all and a preferential love for the poor, the sick, and the needy. This grace impels him to proclaim the Gospel to all, to be the model for his flock, to go before it on the way of sanctification by identifying himself in the Eucharist with Christ the priest and victim, not fearing to give his life for his sheep: Father, you know all hearts. You have chosen your servant for the office of bishop. May he be

a shepherd to your holy flock, and a high priest blameless in your sight, ministering to you night and day; may he always gain the blessing of your favor and offer the gifts of your holy Church. Through the Spirit who gives the grace of high priesthood grant him the power to forgive sins as you have commanded, to assign ministries as you have decreed, and to loose from every bond by the authority which you gave to your apostles. May he be pleasing to you by his gentleness and purity of heart, presenting a fragrant offering to you, through Jesus Christ, your Son... (*Roman Pontifical*, Ordination of Bishops 26, Prayer of Consecration; cf. St. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 3: SCh 11, 44-46).

(Heb 5, 7-8) He offered prayers and supplications

[7] In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. [8] Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered;

(CCC 1600) It is bishops who confer the sacrament of Holy Orders in the three degrees. (CCC 1597) The sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred by the laying on of hands followed by a solemn prayer of consecration asking God to grant the ordinand the graces of the Holy Spirit required for his ministry. Ordination imprints an indelible sacramental character. (CCC 1598) The Church confers the sacrament of Holy Orders only on baptized men (*viri*), whose suitability for the exercise of the ministry has been duly recognized. Church authority alone has the responsibility and right to call someone to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. (CCC 1587) The spiritual gift conferred by presbyteral ordination is expressed by this prayer of the Byzantine Rite. The bishop, while laying on his hand, says among other things: Lord, fill with the gift of the Holy Spirit him whom you have deigned to raise to the rank of the priesthood, that he may be worthy to stand without reproach before your altar, to proclaim the Gospel of your kingdom, to fulfill the ministry of your word of truth, to offer you spiritual gifts and sacrifices, to renew your people by the bath of rebirth; so that he may go out to meet our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, your only Son, on the day of his second coming, and may receive from your vast goodness the recompense for a faithful administration of his order (*Byzantine Liturgy, Euchologion*).

(Heb 5, 9-10) He became the source of eternal salvation

[9] and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, [10] declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

(CCC 1589) Before the grandeur of the priestly grace and office, the holy doctors felt an urgent call to conversion in order to conform their whole lives to him whose sacrament had made them ministers. Thus St. Gregory of Nazianzus, as a very young priest, exclaimed: We must begin by purifying ourselves before purifying others; we must be instructed to be able to instruct, become light to illuminate, draw close to God to bring him close to others, be sanctified to sanctify, lead by the hand and counsel prudently. I know whose ministers we are, where we find ourselves and to where we strive. I know God's greatness and man's weakness, but also his potential. [Who then is the priest? He is] the defender of truth, who stands with angels, gives glory with archangels, causes sacrifices to rise to the altar on high, shares Christ's priesthood, refashions creation, restores it in God's image, recreates it for the world on high and, even

greater, is divinized and divinizes (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 2, 71, 74, 73: PG 35, 480-481). And the holy Curé of Ars: "The priest continues the work of redemption on earth.... If we really understood the priest on earth, we would die not of fright but of love.... The Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus" (St. John Vianney, quoted in B. Nodet, *Jean-Marie Vianney, Curé d'Ars*, 100). (CCC 1599) In the Latin Church the sacrament of Holy Orders for the presbyterate is normally conferred only on candidates who are ready to embrace celibacy freely and who publicly manifest their intention of staying celibate for the love of God's kingdom and the service of men.

(Heb 5, 11-14) Solid food is for the mature

[11] About this we have much to say, and it is difficult to explain, for you have become sluggish in hearing. [12] Although you should be teachers by this time, you need to have someone teach you again the basic elements of the utterances of God. You need milk, (and) not solid food. [13] Everyone who lives on milk lacks experience of the word of righteousness, for he is a child. [14] But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties are trained by practice to discern good and evil.

(CCC 104) In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, "but as what it really is, the word of God" (Th 2:13; cf. DV 24). "In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them" (DV 21). (CCC 1392) What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh "given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit" (PO 5), preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage until the moment of death, when it will be given to us as viaticum. (CCC 1393) *Holy Communion separates us from sin.* The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is "given up for us," and the blood we drink "shed for the many for the forgiveness of sins." For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins: For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord. If we proclaim the Lord's death, we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. If, as often as his blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins, I should always receive it, so that it may always forgive my sins. Because I always sin, I should always have a remedy (St. Ambrose, *De Sacr.* 4, 6, 28: PL 16, 446; cf. 1 Cor 11:26). (CCC 1388) It is in keeping with the very meaning of the Eucharist that the faithful, if they have the required dispositions (cf. CIC, can 916), *receive communion when they participate in the Mass* (cf. CIC, can. 917; *The faithful may receive the Holy Eucharist only a second time on the same day* cf. AAS 76 (1984) 746-747). As the Second Vatican Council says: "That more perfect form of participation in the Mass whereby the faithful, after the priest's communion, receive the Lord's Body from the same sacrifice, is warmly recommended" (SC 55).

Hebrews 6

(Heb 6, 1) Repentance from dead works and faith in God

[1] Therefore, let us leave behind the basic teaching about Christ and advance to maturity, without laying the foundation all over again: repentance from dead works and faith in God,

(CCC 161) Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation (Cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:36; 6:40 *et al.*). "Since 'without faith it is impossible to please (God)' and to attain to the fellowship of his sons, therefore without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life 'but he who endures to the end.'" [Dei Filius 3: DS 3012; cf. Mt 10:22; 24:13 and Heb11:6; Council of Trent DS 1532]. (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).

(Heb 6, 2a) Instruction about baptisms (I)

[2a] Instruction about baptisms

(CCC 1246) "Every person not yet baptized and only such a person is able to be baptized" (CIC, can. 864; cf. CCEO, can. 679). (CCC 1229) From the time of the apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages. This journey can be covered rapidly or slowly, but certain essential elements will always have to be present: proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion. (CCC 1230) This initiation has varied greatly through the centuries according to circumstances. In the first centuries of the Church, Christian initiation saw considerable development. A long period of *catechumenate* included a series of preparatory rites, which were liturgical landmarks along the path of catechumenal preparation and culminated in the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation. (CCC 1231) Where infant Baptism has become the form in which this sacrament is usually celebrated, it has become a single act encapsulating the preparatory stages of Christian initiation in a very abridged way. By its very nature infant Baptism requires a *post-baptismal catechumenate*. Not only is there a need for instruction after Baptism, but also for the necessary flowering of baptismal grace in personal growth. The *catechism* has its proper place here. (CCC 1232) The second Vatican Council restored for the Latin Church "the catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps" (SC 64). The rites for these stages are to be found in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Cf. RCIA 1972). The Council also gives permission that: "In mission countries, in addition to what is furnished by the Christian tradition, those elements of initiation rites may be admitted which are already in use among some peoples insofar as they can be adapted to the Christian ritual" (SC 65; cf. SC 37-40). (CCC 1233) Today in all the rites, Latin and Eastern, the Christian initiation of adults begins with their entry into the catechumenate and reaches its

culmination in a single celebration of the three sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist (Cf. AG 14; CIC, cann. 851; 865; 866). In the Eastern rites the Christian initiation of infants also begins with Baptism followed immediately by Confirmation and the Eucharist, while in the Roman rite it is followed by years of catechesis before being completed later by Confirmation and the Eucharist, the summit of their Christian initiation (Cf. CIC, cann. 851, 2°; 868). [*it continues*]

(Heb 6, 2a) Instruction about baptisms (II) [*continuation*]

[2a] Instruction about baptisms

(CCC 1247) Since the beginning of the Church, adult Baptism is the common practice where the proclamation of the Gospel is still new. The catechumenate (preparation for Baptism) therefore occupies an important place. This initiation into Christian faith and life should dispose the catechumen to receive the gift of God in Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. (CCC 1248) The catechumenate, or formation of catechumens, aims at bringing their conversion and faith to maturity, in response to the divine initiative and in union with an ecclesial community. The catechumenate is to be "a formation in the whole Christian life... during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher. The catechumens should be properly initiated into the mystery of salvation and the practice of the evangelical virtues, and they should be introduced into the life of faith, liturgy, and charity of the People of God by successive sacred rites" (AG 14; cf. RCIA 19; 98). (CCC 1249) Catechumens "are already joined to the Church, they are already of the household of Christ, and are quite frequently already living a life of faith, hope, and charity" (AG 14 § 5). "With love and solicitude mother Church already embraces them as her own" (LG 14 § 3; cf. CIC, cann. 206; 788 § 3). (CCC 1255) For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents' help is important. So too is the role of the *godfather* and *godmother*, who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized - child or adult - on the road of Christian life (Cf. CIC, cann. 872-874). Their task is a truly ecclesial function (*officium*) (Cf. SC 67). The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism. (CCC 1256) The ordinary ministers of Baptism are the bishop and priest and, in the Latin Church, also the deacon (Cf. CIC, can. 861 § 1; CCEO, can. 677 § 1). In case of necessity, anyone, even a non-baptized person, with the required intention can baptize (CIC, can. 861 § 2), by using the Trinitarian baptismal formula. The intention required is to will to do what the Church does when she baptizes. The Church finds the reason for this possibility in the universal saving will of God and the necessity of Baptism for salvation (Cf. 1 Tim 2:4). [*it continues*]

(Heb 6, 2a) Instruction about baptisms (III) [*continuation*]

[2a] Instruction about baptisms

(CCC 1245) The *solemn blessing* concludes the celebration of Baptism. At the Baptism of newborns the blessing of the mother occupies a special place. (CCC 1258) The Church has always held the firm conviction that those who suffer death for the sake of the faith without having received Baptism are baptized by their death for and with Christ. This *Baptism of blood*, like the *desire for Baptism*, brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament. (CCC 1259) For *catechumens* who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that

they were not able to receive through the sacrament. (CCC 1260) "Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery" (GS 22 § 5; cf. LG 16; AG 7). Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly* if they had known its necessity. (CCC 1262) The different effects of Baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit (Cf. Acts 2:38; Jn 3:5). [End]

(Heb 6, 2b) And laying on of hands (I)

[2b] And laying on of hands

(CCC 1285) Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace (Cf. *Roman Ritual*, Rite of Confirmation (OC), Introduction 1). For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed" (LG 11; Cf. OC, Introduction 2). (CCC 1290) In the first centuries Confirmation generally comprised one single celebration with Baptism, forming with it a "double sacrament," according to the expression of St. Cyprian. Among other reasons, the multiplication of infant baptisms all through the year, the increase of rural parishes, and the growth of dioceses often prevented the bishop from being present at all baptismal celebrations. In the West the desire to reserve the completion of Baptism to the bishop caused the temporal separation of the two sacraments. The East has kept them united, so that Confirmation is conferred by the priest who baptizes. But he can do so only with the "myron" consecrated by a bishop (Cf. CCEO, Can. 695 § 1; 696 § 1). (CCC 1291) A custom of the Roman Church facilitated the development of the Western practice: a double anointing with sacred chrism after Baptism. The first anointing of the neophyte on coming out of the baptismal bath was performed by the priest; it was completed by a second anointing on the forehead of the newly baptized by the bishop (Cf. St. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 21: SCh 11, 80-95). The first anointing with sacred chrism, by the priest, has remained attached to the baptismal rite; it signifies the participation of the one baptized in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices of Christ. If Baptism is conferred on an adult, there is only one post-baptismal anointing, that of Confirmation. (CCC 1292) The practice of the Eastern Churches gives greater emphasis to the unity of Christian initiation. That of the Latin Church more clearly expresses the communion of the new Christian with the bishop as guarantor and servant of the unity, catholicity and apostolicity of his Church, and hence the connection with the apostolic origins of Christ's Church. [*it continues*]

(Heb 6, 2b) And laying on of hands (II) [*continuation*]

[2b] And laying on of hands

(CCC 1297) *The consecration of the sacred chrism* is an important action that precedes the celebration of Confirmation, but is in a certain way a part of it. It is the bishop who, in the course of the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday, consecrates the sacred chrism for his whole diocese. In some Eastern Churches this consecration is even reserved to the patriarch: The liturgy of Antioch expresses the epiclesis for the consecration of the sacred chrism (myron) in this way: "[Father... send your Holy Spirit] on us and on this oil which is before us and consecrate it, so that it may be for all who are anointed and marked with it holy myron, priestly myron, royal myron, anointing with gladness, clothing with light, a cloak of salvation, a spiritual gift, the sanctification of souls and bodies, imperishable happiness, the indelible seal, a buckler of faith, and a fearsome helmet against all the works of the adversary." (CCC 1299) In the Roman Rite the bishop extends his hands over the whole group of the confirmands. Since the time of the apostles this gesture has signified the gift of the Spirit. The bishop invokes the outpouring of the Spirit in these words: All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord (OC 25). (CCC 1300) The *essential rite* of the sacrament follows. In the Latin rite, "the sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: '*Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti*' [Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.]" (Paul VI, apostolic constitution, *Divinae consortium naturae*, 663). In the Eastern Churches, after a prayer of epiclesis, the more significant parts of the body are anointed with myron: forehead, eyes, nose, ears, lips, chest, back, hands, and feet. Each anointing is accompanied by the formula: (*Signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti*): "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" (*Rituale per le Chiese orientali di rito bizantino in lingua greca*, (1954) 36). (CCC 1301) The sign of peace that concludes the rite of the sacrament signifies and demonstrates ecclesial communion with the bishop and with all the faithful (Cf. St. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 21 SCh 11, 80-95). [*It continues*]

(Heb 6, 2b) And laying on of hands (III) [*continuation*]

[2b] and laying on of hands

(CCC 1308) Although Confirmation is sometimes called the "sacrament of Christian maturity," we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need "ratification" to become effective. St. Thomas reminds us of this: Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of *Wisdom* says: "For old age is not honored for length of time, or measured by number of years." Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received, have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood (St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 72, 8, ad 2; cf. Wis 4:8). (CCC 1307) For centuries, Latin custom has indicated "the age of discretion" as the reference point for receiving Confirmation. But in danger of death children should be confirmed even if they have not yet attained the age of discretion (Cf. CIC, cann. 891; 883, 3°). (CCC 1309) *Preparation* for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union

with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit - his actions, his gifts, and his biddings - in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands (Cf. OC Introduction 3). (CCC 1311) Candidates for Confirmation, as for Baptism, fittingly seek the spiritual help of a *sponsor*. To emphasize the unity of the two sacraments, it is appropriate that this be one of the baptismal godparents (Cf. OC Introduction 5; 6; CIC, Can. 893 §§ 1-2). [*It continues*]

(Heb 6, 2b) And laying on of hands (IV) [*continuation*]

[2b] And laying on of hands

(CCC 1312) The *original minister of Confirmation* is the bishop (Cf. LG 26). In the East, ordinarily the priest who baptizes also immediately confers Confirmation in one and the same celebration. But he does so with sacred chrism consecrated by the patriarch or the bishop, thus expressing the apostolic unity of the Church whose bonds are strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. In the Latin Church, the same discipline applies to the Baptism of adults or to the reception into full communion with the Church of a person baptized in another Christian community that does not have valid Confirmation (Cf. CIC, Can. 883 § 2). (CCC 1314) If a Christian is in danger of death, any priest should give him Confirmation (Cf. CIC, Can. 883 § 3). Indeed the Church desires that none of her children, even the youngest, should depart this world without having been perfected by the Holy Spirit with the gift of Christ's fullness. (CCC 1313) *In the Latin Rite*, the ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop (Cf. CIC, Can. 882). If the need arises, the bishop may grant the faculty of administering Confirmation (Cf. CIC, Can. 884 § 2) to priests, although it is fitting that he confer it himself, mindful that the celebration of Confirmation has been temporally separated from Baptism for this reason. Bishops are the successors of the apostles. They have received the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. The administration of this sacrament by them demonstrates clearly that its effect is to unite those who receive it more closely to the Church, to her apostolic origins, and to her mission of bearing witness to Christ. [*The end*]

(Heb 6, 2c) Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment

[2c] Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

(CCC 2318) "In [God's] hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10). (CCC 681) On Judgment Day at the end of the world, Christ will come in glory to achieve the definitive triumph of good over evil which, like the wheat and the tares, have grown up together in the course of history. (CCC 2300) The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy (Cf. Tob 1:16-18); it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 2301) Autopsies can be morally permitted for legal inquests or scientific research. The free gift of organs after death is legitimate and can be meritorious. The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body (Cf. CIC, can. 1176 § 3). (CCC 2292) Scientific, medical, or psychological experiments on human individuals or groups can contribute to healing the sick and the advancement of public health. (CCC 2295) Research or experimentation on the human being

cannot legitimate acts that are in themselves contrary to the dignity of persons and to the moral law. The subjects' potential consent does not justify such acts. Experimentation on human beings is not morally legitimate if it exposes the subject's life or physical and psychological integrity to disproportionate or avoidable risks. Experimentation on human beings does not conform to the dignity of the person if it takes place without the informed consent of the subject or those who legitimately speak for him. (CCC 2296) *Organ transplants* are in conformity with the moral law if the physical and psychological dangers and risks incurred by the donor are proportionate to the good that is sought for the recipient. Organ donation after death is a noble and meritorious act and is to be encouraged as a manifestation of generous solidarity. It is not morally acceptable if the donor or those who legitimately speak for him have not given explicit consent. Moreover, it is not morally admissible directly to bring about the disabling mutilation or death of a human being, even in order to delay the death of other persons. (CCC 2299) The dying should be given attention and care to help them live their last moments in dignity and peace. They will be helped by the prayer of their relatives, who must see to it that the sick receive at the proper time the sacraments that prepare them to meet the living God.

(Heb 6, 3-5) And we shall do this, if only God permits.

[3] And we shall do this, if only God permits. [4] For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift and shared in the holy Spirit [5] and tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,

(CCC 1306) Every baptized person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation (Cf. CIC, can. 889 § 1). Since Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist form a unity, it follows that "the faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time" (CIC, can. 890), for without Confirmation and Eucharist, Baptism is certainly valid and efficacious, but Christian initiation remains incomplete. (CCC 1305) This "character" perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and "the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (*quasi ex officio*)" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 72, 5, ad 2). (CCC 1302) It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. (CCC 1303) From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: - it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15); - it unites us more firmly to Christ; - it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; - it renders our bond with the Church more perfect (Cf. LG 11); - it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross (Cf. Council of Florence (1439): DS 1319; LG 11; 12): Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God's presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts (SL Ambrose, *De myst.* 7, 42: PL 16, 402-403). (CCC 1304) Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an *indelible*

spiritual mark, the "character," which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness (Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1609; Lk 24:48-49).

(Heb 6, 6) They are recrucifying the Son of God

[6] and then have fallen away, to bring them to repentance again, since they are recrucifying the Son of God for themselves and holding him up to contempt.

(CCC 598) In her Magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the Church has never forgotten that "sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured" (*Roman Catechism* I, 5, 11; cf. Heb 12:3). Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself (Cf. Mt 25:45; Acts 9:4-5), the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone: We must regard as guilty all those who continue to relapse into their sins. Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts (for he is in them) and hold him up to contempt. And it can be seen that our crime in this case is greater in us than in the Jews. As for them, according to the witness of the Apostle, "None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." We, however, profess to know him. And when we deny him by our deeds, we in some way seem to lay violent hands on him (*Roman Catechism* I, 5, 11; cf. Heb 6:6; 1 Cor 2:8). Nor did demons crucify him; it is you who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins (St. Francis of Assisi, *Admonitio* 5, 3).

(Heb 6, 7-8) Ground that brings crops receives a blessing

[7] Ground that has absorbed the rain falling upon it repeatedly and brings forth crops useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. [8] But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is rejected; it will soon be cursed and finally burned.

(CCC 1078) Blessing is a divine and life-giving action, the source of which is the Father; his blessing is both word and gift (*eu-logia, bene-dictio*). When applied to man, the word "blessing" means adoration and surrender to his Creator in thanksgiving. (CCC 1079) From the beginning until the end of time the whole of God's work is a *blessing*. From the liturgical poem of the first creation to the canticles of the heavenly Jerusalem, the inspired authors proclaim the plan of salvation as one vast divine blessing. (CCC 1080) From the very beginning God blessed all living beings, especially man and woman. The covenant with Noah and with all living things renewed this blessing of fruitfulness despite man's sin which had brought a curse on the ground. But with Abraham, the divine blessing entered into human history which was moving toward death, to redirect it toward life, toward its source. By the faith of "the father of all believers," who embraced the blessing, the history of salvation is inaugurated. (CCC 1081) The divine blessings were made manifest in astonishing and saving events: the birth of Isaac, the escape from Egypt (Passover and Exodus), the gift of the promised land, the election of David, the presence of God in the Temple, the purifying exile, and return of a "small remnant." the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, interwoven in the liturgy of the Chosen People, recall these divine blessings and at the same time respond to them with blessings of praise and thanksgiving. (CCC 1082) In

the Church's liturgy the divine blessing is fully revealed and communicated. The Father is acknowledged and adored as the source and the end of all the blessings of creation and salvation. In his Word who became incarnate, died, and rose for us, he fills us with his blessings. Through his Word, he pours into our hearts the Gift that contains all gifts, the Holy Spirit.

(Heb 6, 9-12) Through faith and patience are inheriting

[9] But we are sure in your regard, beloved, of better things related to salvation, even though we speak in this way. [10] For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones. [11] We earnestly desire each of you to demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end, [12] so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises.

(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. (CCC 1819) Christian hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the *hope of Abraham*, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God fulfilled in Isaac, and who was purified by the test of the sacrifice (Cf. Gen 17:4-8; 22:1-18). "Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations" (Rom 4:18). (CCC 1820) Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus' preaching in the proclamation of the beatitudes. The *beatitudes* raise our hope toward heaven as the new Promised Land; they trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus. But through the merits of Jesus Christ and of his Passion, God keeps us in the "hope that does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5). Hope is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul... that enters... where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb 6:19-20). Hope is also a weapon that protects us in the struggle of salvation: "Let us... put on the breastplate of faith and charity, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thess 5:8). It affords us joy even under trial: "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation" (Rom 12:12). Hope is expressed and nourished in prayer, especially in the Our Father, the summary of everything that hope leads us to desire.

(Heb 6, 13-18) "I will indeed bless you and multiply" you

[13] When God made the promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, "he swore by himself," [14] and said, "I will indeed bless you and multiply" you. [15] And so, after patient waiting, he obtained the promise. [16] Human beings swear by someone greater than themselves; for them an oath serves as a guarantee and puts an end to all

argument. [17] So when God wanted to give the heirs of his promise an even clearer demonstration of the immutability of his purpose, he intervened with an oath, [18] so that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to hold fast to the hope that lies before us.

(CCC 63) Israel is the priestly people of God, "called by the name of the LORD", and "the first to hear the word of God" (Deut 28: 10; *Roman Missal*, Good Friday, General Intercession VI; see also Ex 19:6), The people of "elder brethren" in the faith of Abraham. (CCC 2810) In the promise to Abraham and the oath that accompanied it (Cf. Heb 6:13), God commits himself but without disclosing his name. He begins to reveal it to Moses and makes it known clearly before the eyes of the whole people when he saves them from the Egyptians: "he has triumphed gloriously" (Ex 15:1; cf. 3:14). From the covenant of Sinai onwards, this people is "his own" and it is to be a "holy (or "consecrated": the same word is used for both in Hebrew) nation" (Cf. Ex 19:5-6) because the name of God dwells in it. (CCC 2150) The second commandment *forbids false oaths*. Taking an oath or swearing is to take God as witness to what one affirms. It is to invoke the divine truthfulness as a pledge of one's own truthfulness. An oath engages the Lord's name. "You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name" (Deut 6:13). (CCC 2151) Rejection of false oaths is a duty toward God. As Creator and Lord, God is the norm of all truth. Human speech is either in accord with or in opposition to God who is Truth itself. When it is truthful and legitimate, an oath highlights the relationship of human speech with God's truth. A false oath calls on God to be witness to a lie.

(Heb 6, 19-20) Jesus becoming high priest forever

[19] This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, [20] where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner, becoming high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

(CCC 1821) We can therefore hope in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love him and do his will (Cf. Rom 8:28-30; Mt 7:21). In every circumstance, each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere "to the end" (Mt 10:22; cf. Council of Trent: DS 1541) and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ. In hope, the Church prays for "all men to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4). She longs to be united with Christ, her Bridegroom, in the glory of heaven: Hope, O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one. Dream that the more you struggle, the more you prove the love that you bear your God, and the more you will rejoice one day with your Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end (St. Teresa of Avila, *Excl.* 15:3). (CCC 1544) Everything that the priesthood of the Old Covenant prefigured finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus, the "one mediator between God and men" (2 Tim 2:5). The Christian tradition considers Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High," as a prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ, the unique "high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:10; cf. 6:20; Gen 14:18); "holy, blameless, unstained" (Heb 7:26), "by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:14), that is, by the unique sacrifice of the cross. (CCC 1545) The redemptive sacrifice of Christ is

unique, accomplished once for all; yet it is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. The same is true of the one priesthood of Christ; it is made present through the ministerial priesthood without diminishing the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood: "Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Hebr* 8, 4).